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Hon. Nathan Cullen
BC Minister of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship
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Hon. George Heyman
BC Minister of Environment & Climate Change Strategy
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MLA Kelly Greene
Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries and Aquaculture
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MLA Fin Donnelly
Parliamentary Secretary for Watershed Restoration
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2 November 2023

Re: New measures and more resources needed to prevent an invasion of Zebra or Quagga Mussels to British Columbia

Dear Ministers,

I am writing on behalf of the Shuswap Watershed Council to express our extreme concern once again about the threats posed by invasive Zebra and Quagga Mussels (ZQM) to BC waters. Our concern has only heightened in recent months with the release of the economic impact report¹ and with the recent discovery of Quagga Mussels in the Snake River at Twin Falls, Idaho. We are calling upon your Ministries to respond with urgency and with new measures to prevent a potentially catastrophic spread of invasive mussels to the Shuswap and to BC.

The Shuswap truly is a treasure, and so much will be lost if ZQM were to establish here. The cost of dealing with a ZQM infestation is now estimated at \$64 - \$129 million annually in BC. The economic impact report shows that every major population centre and agricultural region in the province is at risk of a moderate-to-high infestation based on water chemistry, and that there will be impacts to hydro-electric facilities, water treatment facilities and water intakes, irrigation infrastructure and food production, and losses to tourism and property values. This would be a huge burden to tax payers and property owners, yet that number doesn't take into account priceless attributes unique to the Shuswap such as the lake ecosystem or enjoyment of the lakes and beaches by residents and visitors.

¹ *Potential Economic Impact of Zebra and Quagga Mussels in BC*. BC Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship. May 2023.



Fortunately, BC is still invasive mussel-free but with the newest detection in Idaho – with which we share a border and the trans-boundary Columbia River system – many of us are concerned that it's not a matter of *if*, but *when* invasive mussels will spread to BC if new prevention measures aren't put in place.

We are very appreciative of the good work done by Conservation Officers and Provincial staff on watercraft inspection. Additionally, there are several organizations in BC including ourselves working to educate watercraft owners about the importance of 'Clean-Drain-Dry'.

However, we are quite concerned about gaps in the Invasive Mussel Defence Program (IMDP). Additionally, there are other measures that could be enacted by the Province to stop the spread of invasive mussels. I would like to re-iterate our calls-to-action² for your Ministries to better protect the Shuswap – and all of BC – from invasive mussels:

1. It is of utmost importance that the IMDP be expanded such that all routes into BC from Alberta and the USA have a watercraft inspection and decontamination station and that all watercraft coming into BC be inspected. Staffing at the inspection stations should be increased so that the stations can be operational year-round, 24 hours/day. It will take just a single infested watercraft launching into BC waters to start a new population of invasive mussels here. Every year, infested watercraft arrive at our Provincial borders³. The IMDP is the first line of defense to protect BC's waters, but in 2022 and 2023 there were only six permanent stations and two roving stations set up around the Provincial border⁴. This presents a significant gap in the defense, as travellers with watercraft can enter BC via unchecked routes or outside of inspection station operating hours.

2. Introduce 'pull-the-plug' legislation, requiring all watercraft to have their drain plugs removed prior to travelling on BC roads.

3. Review and update the *Provincial ZQM Early Detection and Rapid Response Plan for British Columbia* (published February 2015). As part of this, new methods for eradicating ZQM from waterbodies should be researched and considered for use in BC. Additionally, we believe there would be great value in carrying out a mock response and quarantine exercise on a BC lake.

4. Advocate for new containment measures in Manitoba and Ontario which already have ZQM infestations. The federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans needs to take strong action and fully enact the *Aquatic Invasive Species Regulation*. Our prevention efforts in the west must be met with robust containment measures in eastern and central Canada. Watercraft should not be able to leave watersheds known to have ZQM infestations without being inspected, decontaminated, and issued a quarantine period if necessary.

² These calls-to-action were previously stated in a letter to the Ministry (WLRS) in November 2022.

³ The IMDP Final Report for 2022 reported that 13 watercraft entering BC were confirmed to have adult invasive mussels; the 2023 Summer Status Report reported that 10 watercraft entering BC were confirmed to have adult mussels (this is not a year-end statistic).

⁴ Since 2020, the number of watercraft inspection stations has declined significantly; in 2019 and 2020, the IMDP had a peak level of 12 inspection stations.



We have previously shared our concerns, and these calls-to-action, with the Ministers' offices and with your federal counterparts on several occasions. Unfortunately, we have not been satisfied with the responses we have received from provincial and federal offices to-date. Furthermore, we are not alone in our concerns and requests: in addition to our own calls-to-action, we are in support of recent correspondence and calls-to-action sent to you by our fellow stewards in the Okanagan, the Okanagan Basin Water Board⁵.

The threat of invasive mussels will not go away. Every year, mussels get closer and closer to BC. More action and resources are urgently and immediately needed from the Province – who has the responsibility and mandate for invasive species – to prevent the spread of ZQM into BC. The investment to expand the Provincial IMDP and enact new measures is well worth it to protect our waters and would be a small fraction of the cost of dealing with the impacts of a ZQM invasion.

We would be pleased to meet with you to further discuss these requests and how we can work together to better protect BC's waters from invasive mussels.

Sincerely,

Jay Simpson
Chair, Shuswap Watershed Council
Director, Columbia Shuswap Regional District Area 'F' North Shuswap
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CC:

- Shuswap MLA: Greg Kylo
- North Okanagan – Shuswap MP and Associate Shadow Minister for Fisheries, Oceans and the Coast Guard: Mel Arnold
- Shadow Minister for Water, Land and Resource Stewardship: Lorne Doerkson
- Shadow Minister for Environment and Climate Change Strategy: Renee Merrifield
- Columbia Shuswap Regional District Chair: Kevin Flynn
- Thompson-Nicola Regional District Chair: Barbara Roden
- Regional District of North Okanagan Chair: Kevin Acton
- Secwepemc Kukpi7s: Lynn Kenoras-Duck Chief (Adams Lake Indian Band), James Tomma (Skwlax te Secwepemculecw), Irvine Wai (Neskonlith), and Megan Nicholas, Executive Secretary (Splatsin)
- Shuswap Mayors: Alan Harrison (Salmon Arm), Colleen Anderson (Sicamous), David Lepsoe (Chase)
- Okanagan Basin Water Board Chair: Sue McKortoff
- Shuswap Waterfront Owners Association
- Columbia Shuswap Invasive Species Society
- Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association
- Shuswap Chambers of Commerce: Salmon Arm, Sicamous, South Shuswap, North Shuswap

⁵ "Call for immediate action to prevent invasive mussels introduction to BC". Letter sent by Okanagan Basin Water Board to Provincial Ministers (WLRs and ENV), October 18th, 2023.



About the Shuswap Watershed Council

The Shuswap Watershed Council (SWC) was established in 2014 as a watershed-based partnership of several organizations with an interest or responsibility for protecting water quality. There are up to 22 members that represent three regional districts, two municipalities, the Secwepemc Nation, three Provincial government agencies, and Shuswap communities. The SWC is a collaborative, non-regulatory group that focuses on strategic initiatives to protect, maintain, and enhance water quality and promote safe recreation in the Shuswap. The SWC works alongside organizations that have regulatory roles in managing the Shuswap watershed, complementing their work and carefully avoiding duplication.