

## MEDIA RELEASE

February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024

For immediate release

### Shuswap Watershed Council urging federal government to provide more funding for watercraft inspection to prevent spread of invasive mussels

The Shuswap Watershed Council (SWC) is not satisfied with a recent announcement from the Federal Government regarding investments for invasive Zebra and Quagga mussel prevention in the west.

In the [February 14<sup>th</sup> announcement](#), the government is committing funding to the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation – which will support water monitoring by stewardship groups on over 65 waterbodies in BC – and for two new decontamination trailers for the Province of BC. While the SWC acknowledges these are welcome and needed investments, more funding is still needed to establish additional watercraft inspection stations around BC's perimeter. The SWC has sent a letter in response to Federal Ministers responsible for environment, water, fisheries, transportation, and public safety.

“Watercraft inspection stations are the most important prevention tool we have,” says Jay Simpson, Chair of the SWC. “Quagga mussels were confirmed in Idaho late last year, the closest known infestation to BC. The appropriate response would be to increase funding and ramp up watercraft inspections in BC.”

The [Province of BC's website on invasive mussels](#) states that there were six watercraft inspection stations established around BC in the 2023 season in addition to two roving stations. Most watercraft inspection stations operated from April 1<sup>st</sup> – October 31<sup>st</sup>. In 2023, inspection stations intercepted 14 watercraft confirmed to have invasive mussels.

“We are very concerned about gaps in the watercraft inspection program,” says Erin Vieira, program manager for the SWC. “There are many routes into BC that don't have an inspection station. Where there are inspection stations, they don't operate 24 hours/day or year-round.”

In a February 22<sup>nd</sup> letter to four federal Ministers and copied to BC MPs, MLAs, First Nation Chiefs, chambers of commerce and stewardship groups, Chair Simpson calls for immediate, long-term federal funding to the Province of BC to support invasive mussel prevention through the operation of watercraft inspection stations at all entry-points to BC, 24 hours/day and 365 days/year to prevent the entry of unchecked watercraft into BC.



“Early detection monitoring has indicated that BC waters remain free of invasive mussels. However, that could change in a day or two if a traveller with infested watercraft or gear were to arrive in BC without having been inspected and launch into a lake, thus starting a new, irreversible infestation of mussels. This scenario is entirely plausible since watercraft inspection stations are not open 365 days a year nor are they located on all entry-points to BC, and invasive mussels are known to survive out-of-water for up to 30 days. An infested watercraft could depart Manitoba, Ontario, Idaho or another infested jurisdiction today and be in BC, unchecked, tomorrow”, the letter reads.

A [report published by the Province of BC in May](#) estimates an annual cost of \$64 - \$129 million to deal with the impacts of invasive mussels in BC. These costs would be borne by tax-payers, business and property owners for regular maintenance on hydro and water supply infrastructure, agriculture and golf course irrigation, maintenance to boats and marinas, lost revenues from the tourism industry, and loss in property values.

“If Zebra or Quagga mussels arrive in the Shuswap, the cost of dealing with them will impact everyone here,” says Erin Vieira, program manager for the SWC.

The SWC is encouraging Shuswap residents write their own letter to Ministers, requesting funding for watercraft inspection to prevent the spread of invasive mussels to BC.

The SWC’s letter is posted on their website, [www.shuswapwater.ca](http://www.shuswapwater.ca).

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About: The [Shuswap Watershed Council](#) is a watershed-based partnership that works on water quality and safe recreation in the Shuswap.

Contact: For more information, please contact Erin Vieira at the Shuswap Watershed Council c/o the Fraser Basin Council in Kamloops at 250 314-9660.