



Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
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Re: CALL FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION TO PREVENT INVASIVE MUSSEL INTRODUCTION TO B.C.

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau and Ministers,

It has come to our attention that federal funding to support B.C.'s Invasive Mussel Defence Program may be reduced or cancelled this year, and further, that other funding partners are citing a lack of federal leadership as justification to cancel or reduce their funding. This is just as the threat of invasive mussels has dramatically increased, with a confirmed infestation in the transboundary Columbia Basin. In addition to the actions we called for in [our letter](#), dated Oct. 18, 2023 and which included a temporary moratorium on boats coming into B.C., we are calling for immediate, long-term federal funding assistance for the Province of B.C. to support invasive zebra and quagga mussels prevention efforts. The Government of Canada should provide funds to at least match provincial government efforts across the West, or plan for significant higher management costs in the near future.

In September, Idaho announced that quagga mussels had been found in the state's Snake River, a tributary of the Columbia River, less than a day's drive to the border of B.C. and Alberta. Idaho's pre-planned rapid response was to spread more than 116,000 litres of toxic copper chelate into Snake River, killing almost

seven tonnes of fish, and poisoning a 26 km stretch of the river. Wholesale killing of fish, invertebrates, amphibians, and plants in the river was considered better than letting these mussels take hold. We won't know until this coming spring if the treatment has worked. Also in September, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) declared zebra mussels were discovered in New Brunswick. And then in November, Parks Canada declared zebra mussels had spread another 100km west to Clear Lake in Manitoba's Riding Mountain National Park.

DFO has a mandate to sustainably manage fisheries, work with Indigenous communities to enable their continued prosperity from fish, ensure aquatic ecosystems are protected from negative impacts, and protect the environment when emergencies arise. If invasive mussels arrive in B.C., they will severely impact Pacific salmon by depleting the food web in their spawning and rearing habitats in the Fraser and Columbia River systems. First Nations in B.C. have spent decades restoring these systems and their salmon populations, and an infestation will undermine the recovery of these fisheries. Knock-on effects will be seen in marine environments, where reductions in Pacific salmon populations will reduce a key food source for Orcas and other marine species. Protecting B.C.'s freshwaters from invasive mussels is squarely within the mandate of DFO.

The Canada Border Services Agency also has a responsibility to enforce the prohibition against importation of invasive mussels under the federal Aquatic Invasive Species Regulations. While we applaud the work of border service officers to intercept infested watercraft at many land crossings, CBSA is not fulfilling its responsibility for enforcement. Instead, it relies on provincial inspectors to follow up and decontaminate high-risk watercraft once they are identified.

The new Canada Water Agency has a mandate to improve freshwater management in Canada by providing leadership, effective federal collaboration, and improved coordination and collaboration with provinces, territories, and Indigenous Peoples to proactively address national and regional transboundary freshwater challenges and opportunities. Invasive mussels represent one of the biggest national and regional transboundary threats, yet none of the [\\$750 million](#) allocated to the Canada Water Agency addresses this threat. The Great Lakes region alone will receive more than \$420 million in funding over 10 years to deal with issues such as algae blooms which have been exacerbated by invasive mussels. It would take only \$4 million/year allocated to B.C. invasive mussel inspections to protect the Canadian Columbia Basin, the Fraser Basin, Peace Region, and other major western river systems. The Province of B.C. already allocates over \$1 million/year to this program, but without federal and other partner funding, these efforts will likely fail.

In addition to the threat to Pacific salmon, these mussels are known to stimulate toxic algae blooms, killing migratory birds and contaminating drinking water. They hurt local economies, requiring ongoing maintenance to remove them from in-water infrastructure such as bridges and docks, as well as water systems used to deliver water for agriculture, domestic, industrial, and commercial use. And of course, they degrade the quality of the shoreline environment for human enjoyment.

We view it as unacceptable and unjustifiable, given all the resources and responsibilities of the federal government and your departments, that no federal funding has been allocated to protect freshwater ecosystems from the extreme threat of invasive mussels in Western Canada. Protecting the west from these



mussels is of national importance, and it will take federal leadership to meet this inter-provincial and transboundary threat.

Understanding that protection of freshwater ecosystems and prevention of invasive species falls within federal mandates, regulations, and laws, we hope your departments will work together to find the resources to properly support western provinces in this important work. This is truly a case where a small investment now will prevent massive costs for years to come.

Yours truly,

Sue McKortoff, Chair
Okanagan Basin Water Board

CC:

- British Columbia MPs
- British Columbia MLAs
- British Columbia Assembly of First Nations
- Okanagan Nation Alliance, Chiefs Executive Council
- Okanagan First Nations Chiefs and Councils
- B.C. Local Government Chairs and Mayors
- Pacific NorthWest Economic Region: Matt Morrison, Chief Executive Officer
- Invasive Species Council of B.C.: Gail Wallin, Executive Director
- B.C. Chambers of Commerce
- Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association
- Union of BC Municipalities
- Shuswap Watershed Council
- Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society