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British Columbia and Alberta invasive species councils and PNWER issue call to action to prevent spread of invasive mussels

November 22, 2016

Williams Lake, British Columbia: The Pacific NorthWest Economic Region, the [Invasive Species Council of British Columbia](#) and the Alberta Invasive Species Council are sounding alarm bells about an impending threat from invasive mussels to British Columbia after these highly-damaging species were confirmed in Montana this month. The organizations are calling on authorities to inspect every boat entering British Columbia to prevent an infestation.

The three organizations will hold an Emergency 'Call to Action' meeting Dec. 9 with leaders in Western Canada to map out next steps to prevent serious ecological and economic damage.

"We are facing an imminent threat. There is a clear need for immediate action to keep our waters free from zebra, quagga and other invasive mussels," said Matt Morrison, executive director of Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER). "As a region we must step up actions and prevent boats from entering western Canada without critical inspection. We are calling on the Canadian federal government to immediately start matching current provincial funding for mussel prevention and response. We also urge the establishment of a Western Canada Emergency Response Fund, as called for in the Western Canada Invasive Mussel Prevention Framework."

Invasive mussels are now one step closer to British Columbia with a recent [report from Montana](#), along with known [infestations in Lake Winnipeg](#). In the United States, invasive freshwater mussels have cost an estimated \$5 billion in prevention and control efforts since their arrival in 1988, according to the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. The mussels spread through bodies of water, as well as by "hitchhiking" on boats hulls and trailers to move between disconnected water systems. If zebra and quagga mussels were introduced into British Columbia waters, it would cost at least \$43 million per year in damages to infrastructure, hydropower facilities, water extraction activities and recreational boaters and would have significant impacts on native fish stocks.

While governments have recently signed the Western Canada Invasive Species Agreement to work together, PNWER and ISCBC say this is not enough. At a PNWER meeting last week in Boise, Idaho, recognition was given to the increased boat inspections in British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan, and special recognition was given to British Columbia's unique partnerships with FortisBC, BC Hydro, Columbia Power Corporation and the Columbia Basin Trust in helping fund the province's prevention program. However, the announcement of mussels confirmed in Montana greatly increases the risk of infestation in Western Canada.

"We must ensure that no infested boats enter British Columbia. We need to look at all inspection tools, including sniffer dogs, to find the most cost-effective and sound approach. Every boat club and marine enthusiast in the province needs to commit to protecting our waters." said Brian

Heise, chair of the Invasive Species Council of British Columbia. “We need to see action now.”

Heise said local lakeshore associations should be on alert and report any new boats to the area. A wide-spread standard for [Clean Drain Dry](#) protocols should be implemented for all boaters, marinas and the boating industry across the region, Heise said.

“There has to be a cooperative effort to stop this introduction, involving each province, the federal government and those key industries that will be grossly impacted by invasive mussels,” said Barry Gibbs, executive director of the AISC. “It is not the sole responsibility of any one agency – we all need to work together to ensure effective prevention. Alberta’s important irrigation and water systems are at huge economic risk if invasive mussels arrive, so all parties need to be taking action now.”

Morrison, Heise and Gibbs said they support immediate action in Montana to prohibit the movement of contaminated boats from the upper reaches of the Missouri River in north central Montana. If these mussels cross the continental divide and get into the Columbia River system, no amount of inspection stations can keep them out of British Columbia waters. A regional defense must involve federal, provincial and state governments, and industry and volunteer organizations, they said.

Aquatic invasive species are non-native species, including mussels, plants and animals, which have the potential to harm the environment, the economy and society. Approximately 140 different aquatic invasive species are in Western Canada. Many continue to spread and cause serious damage by clogging waterways, reducing habitat, outcompeting native fish and wildlife populations, and impacting recreation, fishing and swimming.

About the Invasive Species Council of British Columbia

The Invasive Species Council of British Columbia (ISCBC) is working to minimize the negative ecological, social, and economic impacts caused by the introduction, establishment, and spread of invasive species. Their goals are to: educate the public and professionals about invasive species and their risks to ecosystems and economies through activities such as workshops, seminars and newsletters; coordinate research relating to invasive species and make this available to the public; and undertake and support actions that improve the health of British Columbia’s natural ecosystems. For more information or to find your local invasive species committee visit www.bcinvasives.ca.

About the Alberta Invasive Species Council

Established in 2006, the Alberta Invasive Species Council <https://www.abinvasives.ca/about-us> works to increase the awareness of Albertans on the impacts of invasive species to the environment, economy and society. Education, communication and awareness are the cornerstones of the Council’s work. In addition, the Council builds partnerships and undertakes projects that will help reduce the spread of invasive species to new corners of Alberta.

About PNWER

The Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER) is a statutory public/private non-profit created in 1991 by Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Washington and the Canadian provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Yukon and the Northwest Territories.