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Western Canada cannot afford to ignore mussel threat

CALGARY – The immediate need for preparation and funding to protect Western Canada from invasive freshwater mussels was made clear at the Invasive Species session, held Tuesday during the 26th Annual Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) Summit.

In December, the U.S. Congress appropriated \$4 million within the federal omnibus budget for watercraft inspection stations in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana. The federal funds, administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, require a one-to-one funding match with the states.

The Invasive Species working group is calling on the Canadian federal government to act in a like manner, providing money to match provincial investment in prevention and monitoring for aquatic invasive species and specifically quagga and zebra mussels.

“An invasion of freshwater mussels is a significant environmental risk for Western Canada and British Columbia. An invasion would drastically impact native salmon habitat - a critical piece of our culture and community – as well as hydropower and agricultural infrastructure. Industry, government and communities need to work together to fund, educate and defend against this threat,” said Gail Wallin, Executive Director of the Invasive Species Council of British Columbia.

An invasion of quagga or zebra mussels would rapidly foul and damage the operations of hydropower, irrigation, fish hatcheries and municipal water facilities vital to our region’s economy. A PNWER economic impact assessment estimated the cost of an invasion in Western Canada and the Pacific Northwest U.S. to be \$500 million annually.

The Pacific Northwest and Western Canada do not have established populations of quagga and zebra mussels, which have overtaken lakes and waterways across the much of the United States and Midwest Canada. The mussels multiply quickly and are easily transported across jurisdictions on boat hulls and in ballast tanks. Once the mussels establish themselves in a waterway, there is no proven method of eradicating them.

“This is a classic example of how a small investment in prevention will generate massive savings for the government in the long term by avoiding ongoing treatment costs. Provincial budgets are already stretched and an invasion would have devastating economic consequences to our region,” said PNWER Executive Director Matt Morrison.

ABOUT THE PNWER SUMMIT: Held in alternating member jurisdictions each year, the annual PNWER summit draws hundreds of key business leaders, legislators and community leaders from PNWER's 10 states, provinces and territories. Summit participants meet to develop action items on policy issues in working groups focused on: agriculture, the Arctic, border issues, cross-border livestock health, disaster resilience, energy, environment, forestry, invasive species, infrastructure, mining, natural gas, municipal and economic development, transportation, trade and regulatory cooperation, tourism, workforce development and water policy.

More information about the PNWER Summit is available at www.pnwer.org/2016-summit.

ABOUT PNWER The Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) is a statutory non-profit public/private partnership chartered by the states and provinces in 1991. Member jurisdictions include Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Washington, and the Canadian provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and the Yukon and Northwest Territories. PNWER's mission is to increase the economic well-being and quality of life for all citizens of the region while maintaining and enhancing our natural environment; identify and promote "models of success" and serve as a conduit to exchange information.