
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2016ENV0035-000945
June 6, 2016

Ministry of Environment

B.C. joins western Canadian fight against invasive species

VICTORIA – The Province is joining forces with neighbouring jurisdictions in the fight against invasive species, including zebra and quagga mussels.

The Western Canada Invasive Species Agreement, signed by British Columbia, Alberta, Yukon, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, is a coordinated regional defence against invasive species, with an initial focus on aquatic invasive species.

The agreement allows for a greater collaboration between regions in Western Canada by sharing resources and coordinating planning in the prevention and response to invasive species. As an example, jurisdictions will work together to co-ordinate watercraft inspection station locations near shared highway crossings and offer valuable resources to help in the event a rapid response is needed.

Aquatic invasive species, such as zebra and quagga mussels, pose a significant threat to Western Canada's freshwater ecosystems. Invasive mussels threaten native species and fisheries in lakes and rivers. They clog water intake pipes, leading to increased maintenance costs for hydroelectric, domestic water, industrial, agricultural and recreational facilities.

In March 2016, the Province announced an annual \$2-million boost to the Invasive Mussel Defence Program. Thanks to support from BC Hydro, FortisBC, Columbia Power and the Columbia Basin Trust, five inspection stations opened along the B.C.-Alberta border, and three along the B.C.-United States border. A total of 32 mussel inspectors are operating the stations, 10 hours a day, seven days a week.

The enhanced program also includes eight mobile decontamination units, which have the ability to travel to locations throughout B.C. in order to respond to high-risk watercraft notifications from other jurisdictions.

To date, more than 3,200 watercraft have been inspected, of which 124 were identified as coming from a high-risk province or state. Out of these 124 watercraft, six were confirmed to be transporting adult invasive mussels. Sixteen were issued a quarantine period to meet the required 30-day drying time.

So far this boating season, mussel inspectors have interacted with approximately 5,500 people to promote the message of Clean, Drain, Dry and raise awareness about invasive zebra and quagga mussels and other aquatic invasive species.

The public is encouraged to report potential invasive mussel-infested boats and equipment to the B.C. Conservation Officer Service's Report All Poachers and Polluters (RAPP) hotline at 1 877 952-7277.

Quotes:

British Columbia Minister of Environment, Mary Polak –

“Today, B.C. remains zebra and quagga mussel free, but we need to continue to take steps to keep it that way. By partnering with our western Canadian neighbours, we’ll better coordinate both prevention and response to aquatic invasive species. This agreement supports the work we’re already doing in B.C to ensure the health and safety of our freshwater lakes and rivers.”

Alberta Minister of Environment and Parks, Shannon Phillips –

“Aquatic invasive species are a real threat to Alberta’s environment and infrastructure. This partnership between western Canadian jurisdictions will help ensure our waterways are protected and our irrigation systems continue to work properly.”

Yukon Environment Minister, Wade Istchenko –

“We are aware of the negative impacts invasive species have on biodiversity, infrastructure, economic activity, recreational pursuits and cultural and social values. By joining forces with our western partners, we can respond to this urgent and important issue with coordinated, preventative measures.”

Saskatchewan Environment Minister, Herb Cox –

“Preventing the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species requires the collaboration and cooperation amongst many agencies, organizations and jurisdictions. As part of Canadian Environment Week, we are pleased to announce this agreement as one of the many actions being taken to ensure a healthy environment for all to enjoy.”

Manitoba Sustainable Development Minister, Cathy Cox –

“Manitoba is the gateway to the West and an important battleground in the fight against the spread of aquatic invasive species, such as zebra mussels. Working with our neighbours to the west allows us to make the most of our efforts to limit the further spread of invasive species.”

Learn More:

Western Canada Invasive Species Agreement:

https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/Western_Invasive_Agreement.pdf

Learn more facts about zebra and quagga mussels:

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/factsheets/invasive-quagga-mussels-and-zebra-mussels>

For more information about B.C.’s Invasive Mussel Defence Program, visit:

<https://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hra/invasive-species/musselfacts.htm>

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