

Hon. Doug Donaldson
Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development
FLNR.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Aug. 16, 2019

Re: Native mussel protection and invasive milfoil control in the Okanagan

Dear Minister Donaldson,

On behalf of the Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce and its 500-plus members, I urge your ministry to endorse actions proposed by the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) on invasive milfoil weed control and the native Rocky Mountain Ridged Mussel (RMRM).

Specifically, OBWB has requested that the ministry address the following item:

A permanent exemption by the province for the OBWB's milfoil control activities, allowing the agency to continue to work along public beach and boating areas where it has been rototilling for over 30 years, representing only a small fraction of the entire lakeshores.

As has been indicated in previous correspondence, our Chamber fully supports measures that protect native species, including the RMRM. However, we reiterate our concern that any regulations that prohibit rototilling of the invasive Eurasian milfoil could allow the weed to grow and negatively impact habitat for the mussels.

There is also the reality that OBWB's milfoil control program is essential from a social and economic perspective as the plant infests public beaches, boating areas and marinas. In 1991, a B.C. Ministry of Environment report indicated that terminating the milfoil control program would lead to an economic decline of \$85 million in tourism revenue, employment in tourism of 1,700 positions and real estate values of \$360 million. In Vernon, two of the community's primary beaches, as well as the marina, are partially or wholly prohibited from milfoil derooting due to RMRM. If the weed is allowed to flourish unchecked, there could be a significant economic cost.

It should be acknowledged that OBWB officials have operated a milfoil control program for decades and they have first-hand knowledge and experience of our lakes and environment.

The federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans has recently announced a deferral on reclassifying the RMRM as endangered so further study can be initiated. Our Chamber has requested that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans process include community meetings in the Okanagan, as well as an economic analysis of how a SARA designation could influence milfoil weed growth, water quality and the economy. We hope your ministry will participate in the federal process.

In closing, our Chamber urges the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development to consider this matter a priority and that a balance is found between the environment, our communities and our economy.

Sincerely,



Dione Chambers, General Manager
Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce

CC:

Okanagan Basin Water Board;

Minister Wilkinson;

MP Mel Arnold;

MP Stephen Fuhr;

MLA Eric Foster;

City of Vernon;

District of Coldstream;

Regional District of North Okanagan;

Okanagan Indian Band ;

BC Chamber of Commerce