

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson
Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada
min@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

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

April 29, 2019

Re: Reducing conflict between native mussel protection and invasive milfoil control in the Okanagan

Dear Minister Wilkinson and Minister Donaldson,

On behalf of the Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce and its 500-plus members, I urge both of your departments to take immediate action to permit the control of invasive Eurasian milfoil as it has occurred in Okanagan lakes since the 1970s.

Our Chamber appreciates the need to protect aquatic species and specifically the Rocky Mountain Ridged Mussel (RMRM). However, we have significant concern about regulations that have recently prohibited the rototilling of milfoil in areas where RMRM are located, particularly as there is no firm evidence that rototilling negatively impacts the RMRM. If anything, there is evidence that allowing milfoil to grow unchecked will disturb conditions for the mussels.

We are also concerned that the decision to classify the RMRM as endangered under the Species at Risk Act does not reflect more recent studies, and particularly a 2015 study that estimated the total population at nine sites to be more than 13,000. We believe strongly that the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada must review the latest data, and that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans must conduct public consultations on classifying RMRM as endangered.

Anyone familiar with the Okanagan knows that our lakes are at the very heart of our lifestyle and economy. We depend on them for drinking water, irrigation, recreation and tourism. It is because of our reliance on these lakes that effective milfoil control is essential. Without it, the invasive 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. Along with this, milfoil has a negative impact on water flow and increases organic sediment, both of which influence water quality and habitat for aquatic species.

Two of Vernon's beaches infested with milfoil are now partially or wholly prohibited for milfoil derooting due to RMRM as is the community's primary marina on Okanagan Lake. These amenities attract thousands of residents and visitors annually and any restriction on milfoil control will have a ripple effect on those activities.

As previously mentioned, our Chamber takes the status of the RMRM very seriously and we support measures that allow the species to flourish. However, there is a requirement for a more evidence-based and balanced approach that protects the RMRM while allowing the invasive Eurasian milfoil to be addressed.

In closing, we would ask that your respective departments conduct further research into the potential impact of milfoil derooting on RMRM and permit the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) to conduct derooting in areas where milfoil control historically occurs. We also request that milfoil derooting by OBWB be allowed to continue in high public use areas regardless of future recordings of RMRM.

We look forward to receiving a response from both of your departments that supports our environment, our communities and our economy.

Sincerely,



Dione Chambers, General Manager

Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce

CC:

Okanagan Basin Water Board;

MP Mel Arnold;

MLA Eric Foster;

City of Vernon;

District of Coldstream;

Regional District of North Okanagan;

Okanagan Indian Band