

November 8, 2017

Mr. Victor Kowall
vpkowall@mymts.net

Dear Mr. Kowall:

Thank you for your email dated October 20, 2017 sent via Mr. Greg Nesbitt, MLA for Riding Mountain, to the Honourable Rochelle Squires, Minister of Sustainable Development expressing your concerns for the need of greater assistance with protecting southwestern Manitoba from aquatic invasive species. I have been asked to respond on the Minister's behalf.

Protecting our lakes and rivers is a shared responsibility and requires the collective action of all Manitobans. I appreciate your concerns, efforts and suggestions to improve protection for western Manitoba from aquatic invasive species. I have shared these suggestions with the Wildlife and Fisheries Branch's Aquatic Invasive Species program staff for their consideration.

I understand that program staff have been working with representatives and community members from the Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve as well as the Sandy Lake Cottage Association since they presented aquatic invasive species information in Sandy Lake on August 3, 2017. This collaborative work is creating enhanced, practical, localized, and effective ways to protect waterbodies such as Sandy Lake from aquatic invasive species like zebra mussels.

Under the Manitoba's Water Protection Act, people using conveyances such as watercraft, water-related aircraft and off-road-vehicles, and water-related equipment must take steps to ensure they are not possessing or transporting aquatic invasive species such as zebra mussels. The general cleaning provisions (clean, drain, dry and dispose) are simple steps everyone using conveyances or water-related equipment in Manitoba's water bodies must do by law to prevent the spread of AIS. If all water-users incorporate these steps, the threat of spreading aquatic invasive species – even watercraft originating from invaded waterbodies – can be greatly reduced. Stricter decontamination measures apply to water-related equipment and conveyances such as watercraft once they have been used in provincially-designated control zones.

The Central Control Zone (Lake Winnipeg and the Red River) was established for preventing the spread of zebra mussels. The Watercraft Inspection program and placement of its stations, such as at Grand Rapids, Eriksdale, Headingley, and Selkirk, function to intercept western movement of watercraft away from the Central Control Zone. It is both strategic and effective to intercept trailered watercraft closest to the source of the concern whenever possible, and in this case, our goal is to contain the threat before it reaches western Manitoba. It is the law for trailered watercraft to stop at Watercraft Inspection Stations. While placement of a station close to Sandy Lake at Minnedosa would provide local benefit, it would not have the same strategic value in intercepting trailered watercraft moving within the province as the locations currently used in 2017.

An annual end of season review of the inspection station results is conducted to assess the aquatic invasive species monitoring program to ensure that the decontamination stations are located at key pinch points between waters with aquatic invasive species and those without. We acknowledge that there are other strategic locations where a watercraft inspection station could be deployed and will consider your feedback and suggestions when developing the 2018 program.

The branch agrees that communication is essential to this program. Watercraft inspectors have a key role in communication when they interact directly with boaters to increase aquatic invasive species awareness and demonstrate the simple steps everyone must take to protect our waterways. Since the fall of 2016, the Province of Manitoba has greatly increased public communications including initiating the Stop the Spread campaign with a focus on raising awareness regarding zebra mussels. Several print, social media, internet and radio advertisements were used over the 2017 open water season to boost awareness of zebra mussels and the required steps to prevent their spread.

In 2017, the Watercraft Inspection program's six stations inspected nearly 10,000 watercraft with 11 % requiring decontamination. Decontamination is a step that is not required for most day-use or transient boaters. The most significant threat for day-use water-users is the transportation of larval zebra mussels called veligers to un-invaded areas. Draining all water from such watercraft and water-related equipment addresses this threat as adult zebra mussels will not attach within the short day-use period. Thus if all water-users clean, drain, dry and dispose, the risk of spreading zebra mussels is minimized.

To date, 60 warnings have been issued by Provincial Conservation Officers. Several other warnings have been given by the RCMP this open water season. To assist with increased compliance with aquatic invasive species regulations, program staff have been working to establish set fines for aquatic invasive species infractions under The Water Protection Act. This continues to be a work in progress with a goal of being available for the 2018 open water season.

The Province also monitored Sandy Lake and neighbouring waterbodies for the presence/absence of adult and larval zebra mussels. In 2017, 94 water bodies were sampled directly by the Province or through the assistance with other groups through partnerships. To date, zebra mussels have not been detected in Sandy Lake.

The Aquatic Invasive Species hotline was established to address public questions regarding aquatic invasive species issues in Manitoba. Any enforcement issues should be reported to Manitoba's toll-free Turn In Poachers line at 1-800-782-0076 or to the local RCMP.

In conclusion, program staff continue to raise awareness about the importance of incorporating the step-wise measures – clean, drain, dry, dispose and, if necessary, decontamination, to reduce the risk of spreading aquatic invasive species such as zebra mussels in western Manitoba. We recognize and support the prevention needs of Sandy Lake and waterbodies in western Manitoba. I encourage you and others to continue to work with our program staff through Candace Parks (204-945-7787, Candace.Parks@gov.mb.ca) to ensure that all water-users are part of the solution.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'James Duncan', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

James Duncan
Director

cc. Honourable Rochelle Squires
Greg Nesbitt, MLA for Riding Mountain
Candace Parks