

PARCS UPDATE #99

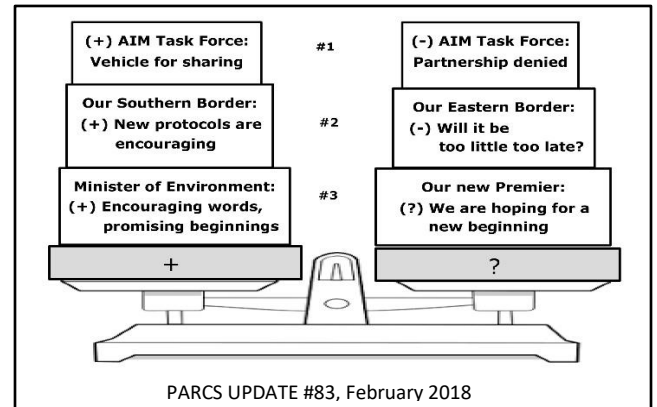
April 20, 2019 - An editorial edition

"Will 2019 bring an infestation of zebra mussels?"

WHERE DO WE STAND TODAY?

Back in February of 2018, in PARCS UPDATE #83 we wondered whether the scales would tip in favour of keeping Zebra Mussels out of our province, predicting:

- 1) It remained to be seen whether or not **the new Provincial AIS Task Force** could be a vehicle for change.
- 2) The chances of keeping invasive mussels out of our province were looking **positive on our southern border but worrying on our eastern border with Manitoba**.
- 3) We were encouraged by our new **Environment Minister** but unsure about our new **Premier**.



So let's take a look at where we stand today, in 2019, on the brink of a new lake season:

1st - We preface with our jubilation that there were no reported infestations in 2018ⁱ - our lakes remains clean!

2nd - We offer the following analysis of last year's predictions:

Yes, the **Task Force** continues to offer an excellent venue for receiving current information from AIS Coordinator, Geri Geiger. **However**, it is with much disappointment that we share our disappointment that the other non-government delegates at the Task Force table recently refused PARCS invitation to co-sign a draft press release that PARCS was proposing about the need for more inspection stations in 2019ⁱⁱ. **WE CAN ONLY CONCLUDE THAT THE TASK FORCE DOES NOT OFFER A VENUE FOR INFLUENCING PROVINCIAL FUNDING POLICY.**

Yes, we continue to **worry about our eastern border** with Manitoba. At a recent meeting of the AIS Task Force, Ministry staff reported that plans for the 2019 inspection program (which already included the Estevan and Duck Mountain locations in 2018) called for **an additional third station on #1 Highway**ⁱⁱⁱ. Ministry staff admitted that their summer staffing component had only been increased from 6 staffing equivalents to 9 staffing equivalent. **While we applaud the work of Ministry staff to date in doing a lot with very few human resources**, we are also aware that *one inspection station open daylight hours for 7 days a week requires 5.6 staffing equivalents*.^{iv} **WE FAIL TO SEE HOW MINISTRY STAFF WILL STRETCH 9 SUMMER STAFF TO COVER 3 LOCATIONS.**

Yes we have mixed feelings about our Minister of Environment and our Premier. On Nov. 12, 2018 a letter from PARCS President Garry Dixon to both the Minister and the Premier indicated our wish "to **bring representatives from around the province** to share early testimony to the issue of invasive mussels at a meeting with both the Minister and the Premier, "anytime between December 5th and January 31st". **WE WERE DISAPPOINTED THAT IT TOOK 9 WEEKS BEFORE WE RECEIVED A REPLY AND THE REPLY DENIED OUR REQUEST FOR A MEETING WITH THE MINISTER AND THE PREMIER!**

HOWEVER - THERE ARE STILL SOME REASONS FOR HOPE IN 2019 - PLEASE CONTINUE READING ON THE NEXT PAGE!

WHY SASKATCHEWAN MIGHT YET ESCAPE AN INFESTATION OF ZEBRA MUSSELS

1) THE FEDERAL AUDITOR HAS SPOKEN ON THIS ISSUE

On April 2nd the Spring Report of the Federal Commissioner of the Environment describes how the auditor had examined the activities of Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Canada Border Services in Manitoba and New Brunswick and found that they “did not effectively prevent the entry of the zebra mussel into Canada (Exhibit 1.5)”.^v

The report recommends that Fisheries and Oceans Canada “develop the procedures, tools, and training” needed by both the **border services officers** and by the **fisheries officers and fisheries guardians** to enforce the federal *Aquatic Invasive Species Regulations*.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has replied with plans to beef-up their program.^{vi} Because Sask Environment has one of the best (if not the only) operating protocols with the Canada Border Services staff^{vii}, it was reported at our most recent Task Force meeting that our Fisheries staff members are communicating with Fisheries and Oceans Canada to build on the solid base established in Saskatchewan.

We must cling to the hope that our Saskatchewan protocols become adopted along the US borders of other provinces, thus heightening the chances of infected boats slipping into those provinces and travelling to Saskatchewan!

PARCS has tried to impress upon our own Minister of Environment - the dangers of infected boats entering Manitoba from the US and crossing into Saskatchewan across our common border. This recent federal report tells **horror stories about the ineffectiveness of the procedures at the Selkirk, MB, border station**, validating our concerns.

2) THE LAKE DIEFENBAKER PEOPLE HAVE RALLIED TO PROTECT THEIR LAKE

LDTF^{viii} made a strong start in **2018** towards protecting their lake from zebra mussels by:

- Setting up information **signs** at each community entrance and boat launch along with a system of **Citizens on Alert** to speak with owners of out-of-province boats,
- Raising money to purchase equipment for **2 decontamination stations** on the lake,
- **Collaborating** with the AIS Coordinator who trained the LDTF volunteer inspectors, & advised LDTF about public communications,
- Distributing **print information** to every household (either by hand or by bulk mail) and **information sheets to boaters**, plus collaborating with Coops to hand out **pamphlets in 8 perimeter communities'** service stations.

Two of the 5 infected boats that came into our province last year were headed for Elbow Harbour. They were intercepted by LDTF and referred to the province for inspection and decontamination. Without LDTF, Lake Diefenbaker would have become irreversibly infected in 2018!

LDTF have beefed up their program for **2019** to include:

- Providing grants to 4 communities with the busiest launches to **hire special staff**^{ix},
- Printing 5,000 **rack cards to hand out to boaters** (with stickers for boat windshields),
- Hiring a **Phone Co-ordinator** to take phone calls on their LDTF HOT LINE (see sign above).



The LDTF Program not only serves to protect Lake Diefenbaker, but also the downstream lakes like Buffalo Pound, Last Mountain Lake and the Qu'Appelle Lakes – plus the communities on the South Sask River flowing north!

IN CONCLUSION: Sometime when I speak at workshops about zebra mussels, there is one pessimistic nay-sayer who is anxious to point out that it is impossible to stop the spread of mussels, that we should resist the temptation to spend useless dollars trying to keep them at bay.

The Federal Auditor's recent report (page 2) states that:

Preventing the spread of the zebra mussel is possible. International borders provide an opportunity for the Canada Border Services Agency to work with federal, provincial, or territorial enforcement authorities to stop the zebra mussel from spreading via boats transported over land. This risk can be reduced by ensuring that high-risk boats are properly decontaminated, quarantined, or refused entry.

Wouldn't it be tragic, while we await these improvements along the US borders in the other provinces, if a zebra mussel slipped through into Jackfish Lake via the Yellowhead, or into Turtle Lake via Highway #3, or into Wakaw Lake, or into Candle Lake, or into Manitou Lake, or into Good Spirit Lake, or into Fishing Lake . . . all because our Saskatchewan Government couldn't find a hundred thousand dollars^x to shore up our defenses while we await these long overdue federal actions!

Lynne Saas, Coordinator of Member Service

Endnotes

ⁱ In 2018, the Ministry **checked more than 2,900 watercraft** for signs of aquatic invasive species (AIS), identifying more than **830 as high risk and requiring detailed inspection. 50 suspected watercraft underwent decontamination**, and **five watercraft were found to be carrying AIS**. Those watercraft were decontaminated and quarantined by the ministry before they could be used in any waterbodies within the province." Quote from Ministry website.

ⁱⁱ One of the non-government agencies agreed to co-sign, another regrettably declined, the others did not reply to our invitation.

ⁱⁱⁱ The **Resolutions from our PARCS Convention** called for inspection stations along the Manitoba border at highways #1 (TransCanada), #16 (Yellowhead), and #3 (access to our lakes in the north).

^{iv} 2 shifts with 2 staff (16 hours per day) equals 4 shifts per day for 7 days = 28 shifts per week (5 shifts per staff member equals **5.6 staff equivalents**).

^v The Auditor General on the federal AIS Program:

http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_cesd_201904_01_e_43307.html

^{vi} Where DFO hopes to be in the next few years:

http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_cesd_201904_01_e_43307.html#hd2e

^{vii} As set up two years ago by Conservation Officers from the Compliance Branch of our Ministry of Environment. Border Services staff at our 11 crossings between Saskatchewan and the USA interview owners of suspicious boats and make referrals to the inspection station at Estevan.

^{viii} **Lake Diefenbaker Task Force against Zebra Mussels** – a group of 22 member communities including 3 provincial parks, 2 regional parks, 6 other lakeshore communities, and 11 perimeter communities, who together function as a committee of the Waterwolf Regional Planning Authority.

^{ix} These staff will work at launches at peak periods, interviewing boat owners, handing out rack cards and windshield stickers, and where necessary, making referrals for inspections.

^x We don't know how much the Ministry of Environment currently spends to stop invasive mussels – **there is no line item in their budget** – the best clue is the last item on page 9 of their 2018-19 Plan which states that "four programs will be transferred to and delivered through the Fish and Wildlife Development Fund, resulting in savings of \$430,000".