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Mink farms could be transmission point for COVID-19

Non-profit calls on government to put protections in place and shut down farms

BRITISH COLUMBIA – Mink farms are susceptible to the spread of COVID-19 and should immediately be quarantined and business suspended in Canada, according to a national non-profit organization.

The Fur-Bearers, the BC-based non-profit founded in 1953 to advocate on behalf of fur-bearing animals in the wild and in confinement, is calling on Health Canada to intervene before health issues become a reality for hundreds of thousands of farmed mink – as well as wildlife surrounding such farms.

“Two mink farms in Netherlands have been quarantined due to positive test results in mink for COVID-19, and that should be of great concern to Canadian authorities,” says Lesley Fox, Executive Director of The Fur-Bearers. “‘Farmed’ mink live in tiny wire-bottomed cages, lined up by the hundreds in often open-air sheds. It is ripe for the spread of disease – just as Aleutian disease razed the industry in Nova Scotia and overseas.”

But the concern isn’t just for the mink who may be exposed (and in turn expose more humans).

“We know mink do escape from these facilities into the wild,” says Fox. “There is anecdotal evidence wherever there is mink farming, including here in British Columbia, from wildlife professionals, that farmed mink make it into the wild. This industry’s ongoing operation, particularly as their breeding season comes to a peak and the population on these farms increases sizably, could be putting wildlife and people at risk.

“We are asking the federal government to instruct provinces to quarantine all mink farms, establish biosecurity minimums for said farms and do full tests on the populations at those farms as well as their temporary workers,” concludes Fox.

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Images from inside Canadian fur farms obtained by advocates are available upon request. Statistics relating to the number of and disposition of farmed mink in Canada are available via Statistics Canada at <https://doi.org/10.25318/3210011601-eng>. The value of mink pelts has declined significantly since a high in 2008, despite tens of millions of government loans, bailouts and other programs (<https://thefurbearers.com/blog/taxpayers-to-fund-20m-bailout-of-nova-scotia-fur-farms>).

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