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Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by the Connecticut Federation of Lakes Larry Marsicano & Tom McGowan

In Support of

H.B. 5413 – AN ACT CONCERNING INVASIVE PLANTS

The Connecticut Federation of Lakes, a statewide non profit organization representing many Connecticut lakes including its largest lakes, supports H.B. 5413 – An Act Concerning Invasive Plants and in doing so, the important work of the CT Invasive Plant Council (IPC). The intent of the bill is to permanently establish an Invasive Plant Coordinator to assist the IPC in their work of addressing one of the State's most insidious environmental threats – invasive plant species.

The work of the IPC in recent years has greatly benefited from their having a coordinator to carry out a number of their initiatives to curb the spread of invasive plants. In my 30+ years of experience with Candlewood Lake I have first hand experience in knowing what happens when an invasive plant is introduced and allowed to become established in a lake, its effects on that lake and on the community surrounding it. Candlewood Lake, the State's largest lake and important inland water resource suffers terribly from the aquatic invasive, *Myriophyllum spicatum*, otherwise known as Eurasian watermilfoil. In "good summers" on Candlewood, areas of watermilfoil cover approximately 200 to 350 acres of the lake. In other years coverage can be as great as 450 acres.

Aquatic invasive plants like Eurasian watermilfoil are known to out compete native species, reduce biodiversity and, in worse case scenarios, create a vegetative monoculture which puts the ecology of the lake at risk. At Candlewood, 95% of the plant community is the invasive milfoil species.

As the problem worsens and takes its toll on recreational use of the lake, the impacted community becomes more and more frustrated to the point of sometimes advocating for responses that are as devastating to the lake as the invasive plants themselves. At Candlewood Lake we've had some members of the community recommend paving the littoral zone, which is the nursery to much of the life in a lake, to prevent the weeds from growing.

Notwithstanding the extreme measures, communities to have a reason for concern. Aquatic invasive plants can have a negative impact on recreation, reducing a lake's swimming and boating values. These changes in turn can have a direct negative impact on Connecticut property values and associated tax bases as described by Fishman et. al. (1999) and DeLoughy and Marsicano (2001) at Candlewood Lake.

Based on survey work of 160 lakes and pond by the Invasive Aquatic Plant Program Group of the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, 60% of Connecticut's lakes and ponds have at least one invasive plant species. Many of those lakes and ponds have more than one and many are suffering the same ecological, social, recreation, and economic-related problems discussed above. It is a foregone conclusion that many more lakes will see introductions of invasive species if we do not pursue an aggressive approach to addressing this ecologically significant problem. And while my focus has been on invasive plant species in our lakes, the picture is not much brighter in Connecticut's other natural landscapes like its woodlands and wetlands.

As Executive Director of the Candlewood Lake Authority I am also aware that our lake communities are terrified that Zebra mussels will be the next invasive threat to invade Candlewood Lake. The hydroelectric company which owns facilities along the Housatonic River and Candlewood Lake itself also has reason to be concerned now that zebra mussels have been introduced into the system by a small brook connecting Laurel Lake in Lee, MA to the River.

IPC has done tremendous work for the State but can not do all that it needs to do without minimal staff. That is why this bill is extremely important. The Council is composed of volunteers and State personnel all of whom bring a valuable expertise to the table.

However the value of the Board members will be diminished without the assistance of the Coordinator. He carries out the tasks and collects the information needed by the Council to make its recommendations to the legislature. He also maintains the communication needed to insure on-going cooperation and coordination among State Agencies, the Green Industry and non profit conservation and lake preservation organizations all of whom are willing to cooperate to assist in combating invasive plants and animals.

With the Coordinator and the cooperation of the Green Industry the Council has been able to broaden and deepen the outreach needed to forge effective cooperation with plant growing and sales businesses that in recent years have done much to move away from the sales of invasive plants. This alone has had a major accomplishment in the fight against invasive plants.

The Coordinator has led and served as a valuable cooperator in educational programs carried out for local citizens and officials need training to know how to identify these plants and to properly remove and dispose of them as part of a State wide effort to slow the invasive plant infestation in Connecticut.

Without the Coordinator Connecticut will lose the only State staff person who works full time across agencies, industry and non profits to address the multi-million dollar threat posed by the ever deepening problems caused by these non native species.

Other States, like New Hampshire, have a full time Invasive Aquatic Plant Coordinator and a staff who through educational, outreach and by establishing local invasive plant boat inspection programs been able to achieve cooperation among State agencies and local governments allowing this leveraged work slowed the spread of aquatic invasive plants in its many highly valued recreational lakes. Under the Council and DEEP we are doing much of the same work in Connecticut but not as effectively with fewer staff personnel.

Truly the investment of \$90,000 dollars to support the position of the State Invasive Plant Coordinator is clearly a matter of “an ounce of prevention being worth a pound of cure”. With the Coordinator in place Connecticut will be much better positioned to identify and early act to stop the introduction of new invasive plants. Connecticut is facing the prospect of additional invasive plant introductions and some of these plants have the track record to do far more damage to our lakes than even those that we are suffering now.

Please do not wait until it is too late keep the Coordinator in place, the Council at work and to give our lakes a fighting chance to avoid a much worse future that we otherwise can hope for.

References:

DeLoughy, S.T. and L.M. Marsicano. 2001. Economic Evaluation of Candlewood Lake With Alternative Water Quality Categories. Candlewood Lake Authority. Sherman, CT. 16 pp.
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