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## **OLR Bill Analysis**

**sHB 6384 (as amended by House "A")\***

### ***AN ACT CONCERNING AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES' EFFECTS ON LAKES AND RELATED FUNDING.***

#### **SUMMARY**

This bill generally does the following:

1. provides for a longer six-foot draw down period of Lake Beseck in odd-numbered years;
2. requires the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to report to the Environment Committee on (a) the Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) fee revenue and (b) grants from the Connecticut Lakes, Rivers and Ponds Preservation account;
3. increases the number of participants allowed under a group fishing license from 50 to 100 people; and
4. prohibits the state from having a closed trout fishing season.

\*House Amendment "A" adds the group fishing license and trout fishing provisions.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage, except the Lake Beseck draw down provisions are effective October 1, 2021.

#### **LAKE BESECK DRAW DOWN**

The bill provides for a longer six-foot draw down period of Lake Beseck in odd-numbered years. By law, in odd-numbered years, the six-foot draw down must be achieved by November 1. The bill requires the draw down to be maintained until January 31, instead of December 31 as under current law.

The bill requires DEEP to enter into an agreement with Middlefield

and the Lake Beseck Association about the lake's annual water level draw down by November 1, 2021.

## **REPORTING FROM DEEP**

The bill requires DEEP to report to the Environment Committee by October 1, 2021, on the (1) amount of revenue collected from the AIS fee and (2) number, value, and purpose of any grants to municipalities and nonprofit organizations from the Connecticut Lakes, Rivers and Ponds Preservation account (see BACKGROUND). DEEP may also report on recommendations for additional ways to fund municipalities' and lake authorities' AIS control or eradication projects.

The bill requires the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) commissioner to give the DEEP commissioner any information necessary for DEEP to complete its AIS report.

## **GROUP FISHING LICENSE**

The bill increases the number of participants allowed under a group fishing license, which DEEP issues, from 50 to 100 people. By law, DEEP may issue a group fishing license to a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization to conduct up to 50 group fishing events per year for qualified individuals (e.g., disabled veterans and certain people receiving services from the departments of Children and Families, Developmental Services, Mental Health and Addiction Services, and Social Services).

## **TROUT FISHING**

The bill prohibits the state from having a closed trout fishing season. (Under current DEEP regulations, trout fishing in most lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams is closed from March 1 to 6:00 a.m. on the second Saturday in April (Conn. Agencies Regs. § 26-112-45(m)).) However, the bill does not limit DEEP's existing statutory authority to regulate the method and manner of taking trout (CGS §§ 26-111 & 26-112).

## **BACKGROUND**

### ***Aquatic Invasive Species Fee***

By law, owners of registered vessels (i.e., generally, any type of watercraft except a seaplane) must pay an annual AIS fee. The fee is \$5 for in-state vessels (payable to DMV when registering a vessel) and \$20 for out-of-state vessels (payable to DEEP) (CGS § 14-21bb). DMV and DEEP must deposit all AIS fee proceeds in the Connecticut Lakes, Rivers and Ponds Preservation account. DEEP must use the account for various purposes, including allocating grants to state and municipal agencies and nonprofit organizations to conduct research and provide public education on managing state lakes, rivers, and ponds (CGS § 14-21aa).

***Related Bill***

sSB 838 (File 143), reported favorably by the Environment Committee, contains the same group fishing license and trout fishing provisions as this bill.

**COMMITTEE ACTION**

Environment Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 33    Nay 0    (03/12/2021)