



Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

145 Dennison Road Essex, CT 06426 | +1 860 581 8554 | www.rivercog.org

February 10, 2021

Senator Christine Cohen, Co-Chair
Representative Dorinda Borer, Co-Chair
Environment Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3200
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

RE: Raised Bill 6384

Dear Honorable Co-Chairs Senator Christine Cohen and Representative Dorinda Borer:

Thank you and honorable members of the Environment Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony for this public hearing concerning Raised Bill No. 6384, AN ACT CONCERNING AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES' EFFECTS ON LAKES AND RELATED FUNDING.

The Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments (RiverCOG) is in full support of Section 2 of the proposed bill and is neutral on section 1 of HB 6384. RiverCOG would like the Committee to consider an addition to HB No. 6384 under Sec. 22a – 339g of the General Statutes: Control of nonnative invasive plant species. This section states “the Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection shall make recommendations and take appropriate actions for the control of nonnative invasive plant species; prepare information materials for distribution; conduct educational activities which address the effects of nonnative invasive plant species upon the state; and prepare and maintain a list of nonnative invasive plant species that will be distributed on an annual basis”.

A pervasive aquatic invasive plant *Hydrilla verticillata* poses an unprecedented threat to devastate the Connecticut River and its freshwater and brackish tidal coves and tributaries. RiverCOG helped establish that this is a new variety of the plant, not found elsewhere. RiverCOG asks that in addition to the requests of Raised Bill No. 6384 that a section also be added to **provide for the establishment of a fund for the development of a coordinated management plan for eradicating hydrilla in the state's waterways, including the creation of a task force to develop and implement such a plan that utilizes the best available integrated strategies to accomplish such eradication.**

A recent Connecticut Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Environmental Review Team program report and the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station have established, through a full aquatic invasive plant survey of the Connecticut River, and public education and outreach materials, that Hydrilla has been found to be present in large and ecosystem threatening amounts in the Connecticut River from Agawam,

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Massachusetts south to the town of Essex, Connecticut. It has been acknowledged as the most feared of aquatic invasive species. It is most feared because of its ability to: reproduce and spread through multiple means including, cuttings, winter buds, and tubers; grow under very low light conditions; grow very quickly up to lengths of 20 feet; form thick mats of vegetation impenetrable to both boats and wildlife; and be moderately salt tolerant. An important factor for the Connecticut River variety is that, to date, tubers have not been found. It is hoped this may be a factor that significantly enhances our ability to mitigate and eradicate it.

Hydrilla not only threatens an estuary of global ecological importance, but also the recreational enjoyment of our beloved Connecticut River. It also threatens other water bodies that provide public drinking water, recreational opportunities, and tourism economy. If not controlled hydrilla is spread by both natural and human means via waterfowl and visits by recreational boaters.

The 17 municipalities of the Lower Connecticut River Valley are very concerned about the existing and potential impact of hydrilla. The impact to the region's and the state's natural resource base, public water supply resources, recreational amenities, tourism economy, and local property values are very real. If hydrilla is allowed to spread within the Connecticut River and within its coves and tributaries the damage will be devastating. We urge state action.

Visual documentation of the existing conditions can be viewed at:

<https://youtu.be/OZ2baYSgl8Y>

Further pertinent resources including existing management plans, research articles and technical reports can be found at:

<https://rivercog.org/projects/invasives-plants-initiative/>

Connecticut River Experiment Station Connecticut River Aquatic Invasive Mapped Plant Surveys can be found at:

<https://portal.ct.gov/CAES/Invasive-Aquatic-Plant-Program/C/Connecticut-River/Connecticut-River-Survey-Results>

RiverCOG thanks the Committee for its time and attention to this most significant issue.

Sincerely,



Margot Burns, Environmental Planner