

Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5143
Title: AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN OFFICE OF AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES.
Vote Date: 3/4/2022
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute
PH Date: 2/25/2022
File No.: 59

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SPONSORS OF THE BILL:

Rep. Christine Palm, 36 th Dist.	Rep. Aimee Berger-Girvalo, 111 th Dist.
Rep. Eleni Kavros DeGraw, 17 th Dist.	Rep Gary A. Turco, 27 th Dist.
Rep. Michael A. Winkler 146 th Dist.	Rep. David Michel, 146 th Dist.
Rep. Emmanuel Sanchez, 24 th Dist.	Sen. Will Haskell, 26 th Dist.
Rep. Josh Elliott, 88 th Dist.	Rep. Lucy Dathan, 142 nd Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

To address the problems posed by the invasive plants in our water ways by establishing an Office of Aquatic Invasive Species.

Substitute language – LCO 2696

Added provisions establishing a Save Our Waters account requiring coordination with the Invasive Plants Commission and education and signs at boat launches concerning DEEP'S aquatic invasive plants technique for use by boat operators.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None expressed

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Lori Brown, Executive Director, Connecticut League of Conservation Voters

We support the bill but would like it strengthened with several provisions:

- Expedite restoration of the position of invasive plants coordinator
- Establish a repository for data on invasive species within the state
- Expand the state's education efforts about invasive species.

Implement penalties for plant sellers that fail to educate consumers about proper handling and disposal of specific species.

Margot Burns, Environmental Planner, Lower Ct. River Valley Council of Governments

The lower Connecticut River Valley communities are concerned about the pervasive aquatic invasive plant Hydrilla verticillate and the threat it poses to the Connecticut River. If this plant is allowed to spread the damage would be devastating. In 2016 River COG report valued the annual benefit for the Lower Connecticut River Valley Region from marinas at \$19.7 million. We ask DEEP to expand its Clean, Drain and Dry Program and boat ramp steward training program. Please increase public education, signage and boat washing stations.

Keith Cagle, President, Friends of Connecticut Sportsmen

The Fisheries Advisory Council agrees that an Office of Aquatic Invasive Species is important and could conduct aquatic invasive species research. We would like the new office to control efforts to better monitor ecosystems and fisheries and also to include native plant restoration among its responsibilities.

Jennifer Carlson, Executive Director, Connecticut River Museum

We support the bill but there should be increase funding for DEEP'S aquatic invasive washing stations, signage at all boat launches, public education programs explaining the clean, drain & dry program and establishing a "Save Our River" license plate to support these education efforts.

Alicea Charamut, Executive Director, Rivers Alliance

We support an Office of Aquatic Invasive Species but there already exists the Invasive Plants Council as established in statute (cgs 22a-381 through 22a-381e). This council has not met for many years but already provides the representation needed. The following are our options for increasing funds

1. Establish a "Save our Waterways" license plan
2. Create a fine for municipalities for discharge water containing invasive plants into Connecticut waterways.

Patrick Comins, Executive Director, The Ct. Audubon Society

The spread of invasive species is not limited to the Connecticut river watershed area there we recommend the new Office of Aquatic Invasive Species coordinate with environmental organizations and entities with local expertise. We recommend the following modifications, Include authority to combat terrestrial and wetland invasive species and expand beyond plants 2. Increase funding for DEEP's aquatic invasive washing stations infrastructure, including signage at all boat launches; 3. Fund a public education program explaining the DEEP's "Clean, Drain & Dry" program; 4. Establish a "Save Our River" license plate, proceeds of which would help fund these educational efforts. (Please note this is different from the existing plate to help ponds and lakes.) 5. Several nongovernmental organizations

are working in the invasive species arena and we suggest removing reference to any specific organizations, but rather to coordinate with the appropriate NGO working on the issue locally.

Connecticut River Gateway Commission

The Connecticut River is the state's ecological "gem" and if invasive aquatic plants are allowed to spread within its coves and tributaries the damage will be devastating. The Connecticut River is an economic driver thru eco-tourism and the recreational boating industry. Establishing this office of Aquatic Invasive Species is an important first step.

James Berardino, Connecticut Water Works Association

The creation of this office serves as a first step in mobilizing Connecticut's environmental stewards and would enable them to respond to new issues as they arise. This will assist Connecticut's water companies along with its municipalities, public health agencies, endangered species and ultimately the taxpayers.

Nathan Frohling, Director of External Affairs, Nature Conservancy

This proposal is right on target and are supportive but we think there are additional provisions that will strength the bill as follows.

- Support greater funding for DEEP's aquatic invasive washing stations infrastructure and include signage at all boat launches
- . • Support a public education initiative or program that helps explain DEEP's "Clean, Drain & Dry" program
- Create an invasive related license plate where the funds raised could support the above related educational efforts
- Penalties for knowingly discharging water containing aquatic invasive

Betsy Gara, Executive Director, COST

Invasive species and cyanobacterial blooms are an increasing concern for our state water companies. They grow rapidly and are difficult to eradicate and can create permanent and serious problems.

John Hall, Executive Director, The Jonah Center for Earth and Art

For years we have helped remove invasive water chestnuts from the Mattabassett and Coginchaug river. We have managed to keep the main channel relatively clear but the infestation has grown worse in the shallow areas. We have no support from the state but have received guidance from the Federal Fish and Wildlife Service.

William Hyatt, Vice Chair Connecticut Fisheries Advisory Council

The proposed Office of Aquatic Invasive species should conduct AIS research, serve as a repository for state-wide data, perform regular surveys, educate the pubic and provide guidance to municipalities. We also believe it should be part of the Invasive Plant Council. FAC recommends two additional items.

1. Control items need to be monitored to avoid damaging ecosystems and fisheries
2. Include native plant restoration as part of the Office of Aquatic Invasive Species

Brian Lanoue, Representative, State of Connecticut

I am further recommending the following to be added to H.B. 5143

"Amend section 14-21aa of the general statutes to (1) Define "aquatic invasive species" using criteria established by the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, (2) divide any funds deposited into the Connecticut Lakes, Rivers and Ponds Preservation account equally at fifty per cent between lakes, rivers and ponds, and (3) establish funding priorities in the following order: (A) State-owned bodies of water, (B) state-operated boat launches, and (C) largest to smallest bodies of water, based on acreage."

This addition will help establish a fair and equal playing field for all.

Bill Lucey, Save the Sound

The proposed Office of Aquatic Invasive Species should be integrated into the Invasive Plant council for coordination with stakeholders. We would like to see an increase in the monitoring of herbicides. Though an essential tool for managing invasive species there is excessive use that has killed plants and also fish and amphibians in smaller Ct. ponds.

William Hyatt, Connecticut Federation of Lakes

CFL has concerns with the new Office or Aquatic Species being responsible for coordinating AIS species throughout the state and serving as liaison among existing organizations. These two can be better served by reinvigorating the Invasive Plants Council. We are also concerned with AIS tapping into the revenue generated by the AIS boat fee established by PA 19-190.

Jason Patlis, President, The Maritime Aquarium

The presence of invasive species in Connecticut is a concern for the state's economy and environment. The establishing of this new office will address and help study aquatic invasive species.

Lori Vitagliano, Government and Public Relations, Regional Water Authority

The establishment of this office will strengthen and provide an additional method to address concerns regarding aquatic invasive species across the state.

Over 29 other people also submitted testimony in support of the bill

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed

Reported by: Pamela Bianca

Date: March 31,2022