



**For the Environment Committee
Testimony of Alicea Charamut, Executive Director
February 20, 2026**

Rivers Alliance was formed to fight for sound water policies at the state and federal levels, to provide education on water resources, and to advocate for any person or group striving to protect water. If you want clean, free-flowing and healthy rivers, and high-quality drinking water, Rivers Alliance is here to help.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the following raised bill before you today.

HB 145 AA STUDYING THE REMEDIATION OF HYDRILLA IN THE STATE LAKES AND THE EXPEDITING OF PERMITS RELATED TO SUCH REMEDIATION – Supports

Rivers Alliance supports development of protocols for the expediting of permits to remediate hydrilla. We also encourage the Committee to ensure that any study provisions in S.B. 145 build upon, rather than duplicate, the substantial body of research already completed on the Connecticut River strain of hydrilla.

Is Hydrilla really that bad?

Hydrilla is one of the most difficult aquatic invasives to control. The Connecticut River strain is hydrilla on steroids. It spreads rapidly, fragments easily, and once established, becomes exponentially more expensive and difficult to control. The long-term costs to municipalities, lake associations, and the state far exceed the cost of early intervention.

In my previous position at the Connecticut River Conservancy, I witnessed firsthand the alarming spread of hydrilla after it was first discovered. I spent several days each week on the river and watched some of my favorite places, including the floating meadows of the Mattabesset River, become overtaken within one or two seasons. Today, as someone who rows crew in Middletown on the Connecticut River, I see the impact every August when hydrilla becomes so dense at the dock that we can launch only one boat at a time instead of three.

The threat of the Connecticut River strain of hydrilla is not theoretical. It is already impairing navigation, recreation, habitat, and water quality.

The need for rapid response protocols

When it comes to hydrilla, there is a narrow window for action. Hydrilla must be addressed before the end of August. Once that window closes, the plant continues to spread, fragment, and overwinter. In the next growing season, ecological and financial costs will multiply.

The Twin Lakes communities have seen the cost of delay. Once hydrilla became established, control costs reportedly increased sixfold. Those costs have not come down. Early, coordinated, well-supported intervention is far more fiscally responsible than long-term containment.

For this reason, Rivers Alliance supports establishing a clear, statewide hydrilla rapid-response framework that ensures:

- Expedited, science-based permitting fast enough to enable same-season action
- Clear roles and coordination among state agencies and scientific experts
- Predictable decision timelines so lakes and river communities are not waiting while hydrilla expands
- Responsible safeguards, including monitoring results and protecting sensitive species and drinking water supplies where required

Build on what has already been done

We also encourage the Committee to ensure that any study provisions in S.B. 145 build upon, rather than duplicate, the substantial body of research already completed on the Connecticut River strain of hydrilla. More than \$7 million worth of research has been done by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and partners in studying control methods, treatment timing, ecological impacts, and cost-effectiveness. That work represents years of scientific evaluation and lab and field implementation. While continued oversight and independent review are appropriate, Connecticut should leverage this existing research and technical expertise rather than restart a parallel process that delays action and expends very limited state resources.

It would be most productive for a study to focus on how the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, and the Office of Aquatic Invasive Species can implement Army Corps recommendations effectively, coordinate roles and responsibilities, and identify where additional targeted research is truly needed.

Resource needs must be addressed

If we want to truly address the spread of hydrilla, permitting reform and a study is not enough. Connecticut's aquatic invasive species programs remain significantly under-resourced relative to the scale of the problem.

I currently serve on the grants review committee for Connecticut's Aquatic Invasive Species Control grants. While this program represents meaningful progress (the funding is a substantial improvement over what existed previously which was zero) demand for these funds has grown dramatically as invasive species spread to more waterbodies. The available funding is no longer sufficient to meet the need. Communities are competing for limited dollars for ALL of the aquatic invasive species that threaten our waters while infestations and spread worsen.

In addition, local lake associations, river communities, and municipalities often lack adequate technical guidance and state-level oversight. Without sufficient staffing and resources at the state level, communities are frequently left to navigate complex treatment decisions, permitting timelines, and ecological tradeoffs largely on their own.

A true rapid-response system requires not only streamlined permitting, but also:

- Adequate funding for implementation
- State-level scientific and technical capacity
- Coordinated oversight and monitoring
- Clear statewide strategy

Otherwise, we risk creating a process that promises speed but lacks the infrastructure to deliver meaningful results.

Conclusions

S.B. 145 is an important step toward building a proactive, science-based response to hydrilla. But it must be paired with adequate resources and statewide coordination if it is to succeed.

Rivers Alliance of Connecticut respectfully urges passage of S.B. 145 and looks forward to working with the Committee to ensure Connecticut can respond swiftly, responsibly, and sustainably to the growing threat of aquatic invasive species.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to protecting our waters.