

Protect the Adirondacks ♦ Adirondack Mountain Club
Adirondack Council ♦ Adirondack Wild ♦ Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter

January 7, 2013

Hon. Andrew Cuomo
Executive Chamber
State Capital
Albany, NY 12224

Hon. Joe Martens
Commissioner
NYSDEC
325 Broadway, 14th Floor
Albany, NY 12233

RE: Support for a New Mandatory Boat Inspection and Decontamination Program for Lake George Administered by the NYS Lake George Park Commission to Prevent New Infestations of Aquatic Invasive Species

The organizations listed above support the creation of a new mandatory boat inspection and decontamination program by the NYS Lake George Park Commission (LGPC) to prevent the transport and introduction of aquatic invasive species into Lake George. Lake George is one of the most prominent lakes in the Adirondack Park. It is known internationally for its high water quality, clarity, and scenic beauty.

Infestation of aquatic invasive species (AIS) is one of the major threats facing the ecological health and economy of Lake George and the Adirondack Park. AIS can rapidly change the ecology of a lake, wetland, stream or river as well as significantly impair and diminish recreational enjoyment.

Two of the most damaging AIS are in close proximity to Lake George and Adirondack Park in the Great Lakes and Finger Lakes, including quagga mussels (*Dreissena bugensis*) and hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillata*). Both of these AIS have wrought tremendous damage in areas of the U.S. where they have not been controlled causing billions of dollars in negative economic impacts. The main vector for spreading AIS throughout New York is the transport of motorboats for public recreation. The majority of sites infested with Asian clams in Lake George are boat launches or locations with high levels of motorized boat traffic. Over 15,000 boats use Lake George each year; over 5,000 transitory boats purchase 1-day or 1-week permits.

One principle of AIS management is that prevention is a more successful long-term strategy than direct management. It's very difficult to eradicate AIS once established in a water body. It's far cheaper to focus efforts on interdiction and prevention than direct management. It's also much better for the ecological health of a water body to prevent an AIS infestation, rather than try and remove AIS once established.

One of the best programs for mandatory boat inspection and decontamination to prevent AIS is in effect for Lake Tahoe in California and Nevada. Started in 2009, this highly successful program shows that an effective interdiction and prevention program can be administered for a large, popular and complicated lake. No new AIS infestations have been found since the start of this program.

For seven years voluntary public education efforts have been managed at various locations around Lake George to control AIS. These efforts successfully reached thousands of boat operators, but failed to stop the additional infestations of either Asian clams or spiny water flea. Voluntary inspections rely upon visual observations for AIS attached to boat hulls and trailers. A key vector for transport of AIS is standing ballast water, water in boat engines and lives wells. Boats with standing water must be decontaminated with hot water at a high temperature and disinfectants. This requires a comprehensive inspection, rather than a voluntary inspection.

The organizations listed above believe that a strong prevention program is needed to preserve Lake George's large ecological and economic contributions to the region. The central focus should be a mandatory boat inspection and decontamination program to prevent new AIS infestations. This program should be centrally managed and administered by the LGPC. This program will require statutory changes in the NYS Environmental Conservation Law (NYS ECL) that governs the LGPC in order increase boat and dock fees to pay for administration of this program and to enhance direct AIS control and management authority.

The Lake George effort also needs full cooperation from the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), which operates three major boat launches on Lake George – all of which allow 24/7 unsupervised access to the lake. DEC management of boat launches around the Adirondacks and at state campgrounds has, unfortunately, enabled major AIS infestations at DEC facilities on Lake Durant and Upper Saranac Lake, among other locations. The overwhelming majority of lakes in the Adirondack Park that are infested in AIS have either DEC boat launches and campgrounds with boat launches.

Lake George has been infested with AIS since the mid-1980s with Eurasian water milfoil (*myriophyllum spicatum*) and curly leaf pondweed (*Potamogeton crispus*). In 1999, zebra mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*) were found. In 2010, Asian clams (*Corbicula fluminea*) were found and in 2012 and spiny water flea (*Bythotrephes longimanus*) was also discovered. With the exception of spiny water flea, all other AIS in Lake George are under active management. Total AIS management cost is predicted to surpass \$1.2 million in 2012.

In short, the time for a reactive approach to AIS by DEC is over. It is vital that the new Lake George program receive full and proactive support from the DEC.

We note that this program has strong support from local governments around Lake George and the Lake George business community, all of who depend upon a healthy Lake George. These stakeholders have contacted you already to express their support.

We call upon you to support this new program for the long-term protection of Lake George, which is the most important economic asset of the greater Warren County area and vital to this area's and the Adirondack Park's quality of life.

The organizations listed above thank you for your attention and action on this important issue.

Sincerely,

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