



The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station

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THE CAES INVASIVE AQUATIC PLANT PROGRAM DISCOVERS AND MAPS NOVEL AGGRESSIVE STRAIN OF HYDRILLA IN THE CONNECTICUT RIVER

New Haven, CT - The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station Invasive Aquatic Plant Program (CAES IAPP) has discovered a new strain of hydrilla infesting the Connecticut River. Hydrilla is among the most troublesome invasive aquatic plants in Florida and other southern states. It crowds out native vegetation, harms fisheries, sickens wildfowl, impedes recreation, and reduces property values. Following reports of hydrilla occurring in the southern portion of the Connecticut River, a task force led by the CAES IAPP was formed in 2018 to perform a preliminary survey from central Vermont/New Hampshire to Long Island Sound. No hydrilla was found north of southern Massachusetts; however, from the Connecticut border south, hydrilla became common. Portions of the river and its coves were choked with the weed. The densest beds occurred on shallow shoals and in protected coves. “Finding such dense stands of hydrilla in a northern state is alarming and could be a result of a warming climate” said Gregory Bugbee who directs the CAES IAPP. “We have found small populations in several lakes, but these do not compare to the extensive areas in the Connecticut River.” The Connecticut River hydrilla is far more robust than that seen elsewhere in the state. Working in conjunction with Dr. Nicholas Tippery at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater,



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with funding from the Northeast Aquatic Nuisance Species Panel, the Connecticut River hydrilla was determined to be a strain genetically distinct from any yet found in North America.

With primary funding from the Connecticut River Gateway Commission, supplemental support from the Eight Mile River Wild & Scenic Watershed, and organization by CT Resource Conservation and Development Area and the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments, CAES IAPP performed a comprehensive survey of the Connecticut River from Haddam to Long Island Sound in 2019. “The Connecticut River is an invaluable natural resource and this work provides an important database needed to preserve it for present and future generations” said J.H. Torrance Downes, spokesperson for the Connecticut River Gateway Commission. The 2019 survey found hydrilla in large dense patches in many coves, several marinas, most tributaries, and shallows along the river’s mainstem. A total of 189 acres of hydrilla was documented along with other invasive plants, including 130 acres of Eurasian watermilfoil. The CAES IAPP has prepared an interactive app where the results of the survey can be found (<https://portal.ct.gov/CAES/Invasive-Aquatic-Plant-Program/Connecticut-River/Connecticut-River-2019>).

The CAES IAPP is hoping to acquire funding to survey the river from Haddam to the Massachusetts border in 2020. Once the full extent of the hydrilla infestation is known, then a management plan can be developed. “The CAES IAPP has been working to understand and protect Connecticut’s water resources in the state since 2004 and this work on the Connecticut River adds significantly to existing knowledge of how this environment is changing” says Dr. Jason C. White, Director of CAES. The CAES IAPP houses a database that began in 2004 and now contains over 370 aquatic vegetation maps of nearly 250 waterbodies, nearly 5000 digitized herbarium aquatic plant mounts, and a record of the numerous journal articles and Station bulletins produced. It can be accessed here <https://portal.ct.gov/CAES-IAPP>.

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