



Algae blooms from the Rainbow Reservoir boat launch. (Farmington River Watershed Association)

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## \$460,000 Stamp Proceeds Fund 21 Local Projects Battling Aquatic Invasives

BY BRENDAN CROWLEY · MAY 6, 2021

A new registration fee on boats is giving groups that work to combat invasive aquatic species a steady source of state funding for the first

time, providing some help to the uphill battle of fending off fast-spreading plants like hydrilla and water chestnut.

Beginning in 2020, all Connecticut boat owners were required to purchase a \$5 invasive species stamp to operate a boat, and out-of-state boaters had to pay \$25 for the stamp. As of December 2020, the boaters had purchased \$460,000 worth of stamps, of which \$360,000 was issued as grants.

The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection used \$50,000 of the revenue, along with \$50,000 in federal funds, to hire an aquatic invasive species program coordinator. DEEP used the remaining \$50,000 to hire two seasonal Connecticut River stewards.

Gregory Bugbee, the principal investigator for the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station Invasive Aquatic Plant Program, said the \$30,000 grant his program received for its operations and \$6,000 for educational materials will keep the program going for at least another year – something that was in question without the funds.

The program was originally funded by federal earmarks, and started from scratch to survey the entire state for a full account of what invasive plants were a problem, where, and why. The program has continued surveying, and does testing and research to support other groups managing invasive plants.

Those earmarks that gave the program its first funding fell out of favor in Washington until Rep. Rosa DeLauro recently revived them, so the program has relied on grants from groups it provided services for since the late 2000s.

Bugbee is a state employee, but his technician and summer assistant are paid by grants the program brings in, as is the equipment they use.

# 2020 Aquatic Invasive Species grants

DEEP awarded \$360,000 in grants from revenues from the first year of selling Aquatic Invasive Species boating stamps.



Organization	Project Location	Project Type/Description	Funding Awarded (\$)
Amos Lake Association, Inc.	Amos Lake, Preston, CT	Control/Management: Control of Variable Water Milfoil and Lake Management Plan for Amos Lake	21,504
Ball Pond Advisory Committee	Ball Pond, New Fairfield, CT	Research: Identification and Monitoring of Cyanobacteria in Ball Pond, Using Plankton Tows and Fluorometry	2,960
Bantam Lake Protective Association	Bantam Lake	Bantam Lake sediment analysis in anoxic hypolimnion controlling cyanobacteria blooms due to phosphorus loading during lake stratification	10,367
Candlewood Lake Authority	Candlewood Lake	Education/Outreach: Candlewood Lake Watershed Steward Program to Educate Boaters on Aquatic Invasives Threatening Candlewood Lake	26,711
Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station	various	Research: Support for the CAES Invasive Aquatic Plant Program	30,000
Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station	n/a - educational material	Education/Outreach: Connecticut's Invasive Aquatic Plant, Clam, and Mussel Identification Guide, 4th Edition	6,000
Connecticut River	Connecticut	Research: Piloting Management of Hydrilla and creating a Hydrilla	28,710

Agency	River	Program	Funding
Connecticut River Conservancy	Connecticut River	Hydrilla Management Plan for the CT River watershed	\$28,710
Connecticut River Conservancy	Connecticut River	Control/Management: Coordinate hand removal of water chestnut, trapa natans, in the Connecticut River Watershed	16,795

“We were spending more than we were bringing in, so we were on the verge of failing, and still not in the best shape,” Bugbee said. “I mean, even \$30,000 doesn’t go very far to hire people and keep the program going. We wanted to make sure our request was at the minimum that I felt we needed to keep the program going for this year, because there’s so many other good needs out there.”

Bugbee said he’s now confident the program will remain open through this year, and then he’ll worry about next year. He said Connecticut is still behind neighboring states in funding efforts to address aquatic invasive plants, but the boat registration fees have gone a long way.

“There was nothing prior to that, really, to fund anything,” Bugbee said.

The boat registration fees will fund 21 different projects from 19 different groups, and hydrilla, water chestnut and cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) are each the focus of several funded projects.

The Connecticut River Conservancy was awarded grants for two programs – \$28,710 for piloting a management plan for the [Hydrilla](#) that has taken over the [coves and shallow banks](#) of the Connecticut River, and \$16,795 to boost [water chestnut removal](#) efforts in the watershed.

Kelsey Wentling, the conservancy’s river steward for Connecticut, said the water chestnut funding will allow the conservancy to hire more seasonal staff to coordinate water chestnut pulling efforts – where volunteers in kayaks pull out as much of the floating carpet that the invasive plants form on top of the water as possible before seeds start to drop around August.

Wentling said that last year the conservancy's pulling efforts focused on the Mattabassett River in Middletown, Vinton's Millpond in South Windsor and Keeney Cove in Glastonbury. The DEEP funding is meant to increase efforts in those areas, but having additional staff should help the conservancy's efforts in other spots along the river.

There were a few sites where people reported chestnut outbreaks on the conservancy's new [Water Reporter app](#), but without the staff, these sites could not be addressed last year, Wentling said. Having more seasonal staff should help them reach those spots this year, and to increase efforts around Cromwell and Portland, she said.

In total, \$50,924 went to projects specifically targeting water chestnut infestations, including \$25,500 to the Housatonic Valley Association for Lake Kenosia.

The grants also provide some funding to address the [Hydrilla infestation](#) that has covered at least 200 acres of the lower third of the Connecticut River – including the \$28,710 going to the Connecticut River Conservancy and \$50,000 going to Coventry to help the town manage hydrilla in Coventry Lake, and to implement a monitoring program.

Wentling said the conservancy will use its funding on both prevention and control. Part of the plan is to buy heavy, plastic mats to lay down on the river bed to suppress the hydrilla early in the growing season. The conservancy will also use the funds to mechanically harvest hydrilla from the river bed, [using a machine](#) that works like a combine on the water to pull up the plants.

“I can't say it enough that the most important thing people should be doing is to [clean, drain and dry](#) their boats – really anything they're using in the water – because we don't want to have to deal with more infestations when we are already trying to manage the infestations that exist,” Wentling said.

In total, four projects focusing on cyanobacteria were granted \$62,682, including \$46,130 to the Farmington River Watershed Association. Aimee Petras, programs director at the association said they will be using the funds to research a major cyanobacteria bloom on the Rainbow Reservoir in Windsor that continues on the river below the dam.

The study will find what nutrients are in the water and the sediment and what bacteria is forming on the lake to try to identify a cause and possible solutions. The reservoir is a major attraction for boaters, and people would swim in it before the cyanobacteria blooms that can release dangerous toxins into the water caused a warning sign to be put up.

The cyanobacteria blooms thrive in warm, still water and can feed on nutrients from lawn fertilizers or leaking septic systems that wash into the river and settle in the reservoir. It's a problem [across the Northeast](#).

“We’re just going to see this happen more frequently and for longer durations in combination with climate change,” Laura Hart, conservation projects director at the association. “The air is getting warmer, the water is getting warmer, and we’re getting more severe droughts, making the situation more favorable for some bacteria.”



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