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Experts concerned about invasive plant growing in local rivers

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Hydrilla verticillata. (USGS photo)

(WFSB) – The state is concerned about an invasive plant called hydrilla.

The aquatic weed was discovered in 2016 and local leaders are worried about its ecological and economic impacts.

Experts say this aquatic weed is exponentially growing. They say by August, the banks of the river will be so congested with hydrilla that you won't be able to fish.

Underneath the surface of the Connecticut River, a weed native to Asia is growing. It's already a tangible issue on the Mattabasset River.

"The mats of hydrilla were so thick that our kayaks became stuck and getting our paddles into the water to push ourselves back out was a challenge," said Kelsey Wentling, CRC River Steward.

Experts say that if left unchecked, hydrilla will kill off native plants and spread to other rivers.

"Imagine vast mats of this aquatic plant coating the river from the top to the bottom. If you're a bass fisherman in a canoe, not only can you not get your lure through that, there's no fish in there," said Bill Lucey, Long Island Soundkeeper.

Senator Richard Blumenthal is requesting \$100 million of federal funds over the next four years to eradicate hydrilla. They are concerned about the economic fallout if the infestation isn't controlled.

"My concern would probably be for the boaters, the fisherman, and keeping it natural. We don't need anymore invasive species," said John Yarlott.

Blumenthal says climate change is accelerating the spread of this invasive species.

"It's changing temperatures in the air and in the water and that is giving the hydrilla a sort of jumping off point," Blumenthal said.

Part of \$100 million is for an awareness campaign. They want boaters to know to clean their boats to prevent cross contaminating other rivers and lakes. Before leaving the boat launch, boaters should clean all aquatic plants from the boat and trailer, drain all the water, dry, and clean the boat before the next use.