



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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Executive Director

February 24, 2022

Re: House Bill 5143 - An Act Establishing an Office of Aquatic Invasive Species.

Honored Co-Chairs Sen. Cohen and Rep. Gresko, Vice Chairs Sen. Slap and Rep. Palm, Ranking Members Sen. Miner and Rep. Harding, Distinguished Members of the Environment Committee,

The Council on Environmental Quality (Council) is a nine-member board that works independently of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to assess the condition of Connecticut's environment and report its findings annually to the Governor, recommend actions to improve state environmental programs, advise other state agencies on the environmental impacts of proposed projects, and investigate citizens' complaints and allegations of violations of environmental laws.

The Council supports provisions of House Bill 5143 that would establish an Office of Aquatic Invasive Species within the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES) with certain responsibilities to coordinate research efforts, serve as a repository for state-wide data regarding aquatic invasive species, perform regular surveys and educate the public about aquatic invasive plants.

This month the Council released "[Invasives: Previously Described and Newly Arrived](#)" as an update to its report of 2002 on the topic of invasive species in our state. In the intervening twenty years, the species that were identified in that 2002 report have prospered and many new invasive species, both animal and plant, have taken up residence in the state. None have been extirpated and it is not realistic to expect that they will be. In fact, it is to be expected that more will arrive as a consequence of the warming climate that is gradually making Connecticut more hospitable to species that do not tolerate cold weather. The adverse impacts of invasives affect all the state's land forms and ecosystems, from its waterways to its natural lands and also its working lands and developed landscapes. The ecological, economic and human health costs of unchecked invasive species can be high.

The Council's recommendations in its report are listed below. Two of its recommendations are contained within the provisions of House Bill 5143:

- Expedite restoration of the position of invasive plants coordinator. This recommendation corresponds to the Bill's provision to (1) Coordinate research efforts throughout the state to reduce duplication of effort and costs associated with the control and eradication of aquatic invasive species.
- Establish a repository for data on invasive species within the state. This recommendation corresponds to the Bill's provision to (2) serve as a repository for state-wide data on the health of rivers, lakes and ponds.

While supporting those provisions of House Bill 5143, the Council believes that more needs to be done in regard to the Bill's call, in provision (4) for expanding the state's education efforts about invasive species.

New Jersey and Delaware have enacted requirements that sellers of potentially invasive plants include labels to educate consumers about proper handling and disposal of specific species.

Preventing invasive species from taking over and disrupting Connecticut's landscapes and waterways, will require advanced planning, innovative legislation, vigilance, maintenance, coordination and prioritization of the expenditure of human energy and, importantly, public funds. In 2021, DEEP allocated \$360,000 in grants from the Connecticut Lakes, Rivers and Ponds Preservation Account to applicants for research, education and control projects throughout the state to deal with invasive species. If aquatic invasive species are to be contained, a greater effort to inspect boats and educate boaters at state boat launches will be needed. This will necessitate additional funding for staff to support DEEP's efforts in this area.

The Council's report recommended additional steps that pertain to both aquatic and terrestrial invasive species. They are summarized here:

- Prioritize responses, publicize plans and develop an effective capability for rapid response to new reports of harmful infestations, both on public and private lands.
- Consider allowing municipal or state authorities to declare the species a public nuisance and launch the action needed to eliminate it.
- Prioritize prevention of invasive infestations on state lands and at state-supported projects using contractual provisions in state construction projects.
- Encourage the private sector to be proactive in halting the spread of invasive species.

The Council would be pleased to work with the Environment Committee in elaborating the ideas put forth in its report.

Thank you for consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,



Peter Hearn,
Executive Director