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**TO:** House Committee on Appropriations  
Senate Committee on Appropriations

**FROM:** Pat Suozzi, President, Federation of Vermont Lakes and Ponds

**DATE:** March 1, 2023

**RE:** FY 24 Budget

This is a more detailed version of the oral testimony presented at the February 28, 2023 public hearing.

The Federation of Vermont Lakes and Ponds is a statewide organization of volunteer lake associations, lake stewards, and individuals. On behalf of our members, I am addressing the woeful lack of funding for the prevention and control of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) in our public waters.

Aquatic invasive species are biological pollutants and are extremely difficult to contain, control, or eradicate. According to the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#), “Aquatic invasive species damage wildlife and communities by permanently altering habitats, reducing production of fisheries, decreasing water availability to residential and commercial users, blocking transportation routes, choking irrigation canals, fouling industrial and public water supply pipelines, degrading water quality, and decreasing property values...Once introduced, an invasive species can spread uncontrollably, harming vital ecosystems and native wildlife and plants and impacting recreation, human, animal, and plant health, the economy, and infrastructure.”

Invasive species are considered **one of the ten major stressors on Vermont’s surface waters** as identified under the [Vermont Surface Water Management Strategy](#).

The primary cause of the spread of AIS in our public waters is humans moving boats and other aquatic gear from waterbody to waterbody. For that reason, boat inspections and reduction of existing infestations are crucial to stop AIS from spreading.

Our volunteer lake associations, in collaboration with local municipalities, have worked hard to prevent this spread by establishing greeter programs at public fishing accesses to inspect and clean boats entering and leaving waterbodies to ensure that no AIS is present. Volunteer lake associations on already infected lakes also have the added work of reducing and controlling their infestations to prevent those invasives being carried from their water body to uninfected waterbodies.

Funding for these efforts, however, has long been inadequate. Due to lack of funding, we currently have **only 30 active greeter programs at public boat accesses while we have over 190 public boat accesses**, leaving the majority of our lakes and ponds entirely unprotected. Of these 30 active programs, many cannot afford to staff them full-time and only 4 currently employ the most effective method for ensuring that boats do not carry invasives: hot-water boat washers. In addition, there is very little funding for reduction and control of infestations.

*To preserve and protect Vermont’s lakes, ponds, and their watersheds  
for the benefit of this and future generations.*

The DEC Aquatic Nuisance Control Grant-in-Aid program is the primary source of funding for both prevention and control efforts. However, **only \$25,000 per year comes from the state's general fund**; the remainder is from a portion of motorboat registration fees. This program had been level funded for over a decade at \$450,000. **However, for 2023 it is being reduced by 22% to a meager \$350,000 for the entire state**

Aquatic Invasive prevention and control programs have also been deemed not eligible for funding from the over \$50 million Clean Water Fund.

Our lakes and ponds do not belong to our lake associations, nor to the property owners around these waterbodies, nor to the local municipalities. Our lakes and ponds belong to all of us. They are all public waters, held in trust by the state for all Vermonters.

Furthermore, state statute requires the prevention and control of AIS. In 1978, Vermont lawmakers recognized the critical threat posed by aquatic invasive species and passed Vermont's Aquatic Nuisance Control Law. This law states: *"It is the policy of the state of Vermont to prevent the infestation and proliferation of invasive species in the state that result in negative environmental impacts, including habitat loss and a reduction in native biodiversity along with adverse social and economic impacts and impacts to the public health and safety."* ([10 V.S.A, Chapter 50. §1451](#))

It is not possible to do this work without a reasonable and reliable level of funding and adequate technical staff to train and support volunteers.

We, therefore, ask that **you ensure that there is funding of \$1 million in the state budget for the Aquatic Nuisance Control Grant-in-Aid program** and that there is additional and adequate funding for technical staff in the Department of Environmental Conservation to provide support and training as we continue to work together to protect and improve Vermont's public waters for all of us now and for future generations.

Thank-you