

Testimony to House Appropriations on Funding Needs to Manage Aquatic Invasive Species in VT Lakes

Vermont's 800 Lakes and Ponds are some of the state's most important assets, serving as drivers for economic growth, havens for biodiversity, beloved recreational sites, and key sources of property value. Our lakes and ponds face many threats, including shoreland development, cyanobacteria blooms, non-point source pollution, and aquatic invasive species (AIS).

Aquatic Invasive Species are unfortunately infesting more of our lakes and ponds, limiting their recreational potential, decreasing the quality of aquatic habitat, decreasing property values, and creating significant challenges for municipalities and volunteer organization across the state. Lake Carmi in my district is infested with invasive Eurasian Water Milfoil, like more than 100 other lakes across the state, and the Town of Franklin and volunteer organizations spend a significant amount of time and money trying to limit the spread of this plant so that Vermonters and our visitors can enjoy the many uses of the lake, like swimming, boating, and fishing.

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) supports these efforts and has limited staff and funding to fight the spread of aquatic invasive species in Vermont. For a number of reasons, DEC has not prioritized AIS management efforts over the last ten years, and both the funding and staffing available for these efforts has decreased. While in 2007 there were four full time staff members working on this issue, today there are only two. Furthermore, grant funding derived from motorboat registration fees and federal grants to help municipalities and lake associations prevent the spread of AIS has been stagnant over the last 10 years, and will decrease by 22 percent this coming summer, from \$450,000 to \$350,000. Only \$25,000 of general funds go to AIS prevention efforts annually, which is minuscule compared to many other DEC programs and the scope and scale of the challenge AIS proliferation creates. Over this period of decreased funding and staffing, many additional lakes have become infested with AIS, a negative outcome that perhaps could have been avoided if adequate resources had been funded.

These funding and staffing decreases place a greater burden on municipalities and lake associations to try to manage these infestations; they are already contributing three dollars for every one dollar they receive from DEC, and results in inadequate completion of AIS prevention work. For example, greeter programs which work with boaters at access areas to keep AIS out of our waters and provide entry-level employment for many rural youth don't have the resources to fund staff during all of the summer busy use periods, leaving our lakes and ponds unprotected and at risk of spread of AIS and new infestations.

I respectfully ask you to provide additional funding for DEC's AIS prevention efforts so that this productive partnership of DEC, municipalities, and lake associations can be more successful in keeping our lakes free of aquatic invaders. There is currently a \$1 million shortfall in AIS funding needs for greeter programs, AIS management projects, and education and outreach efforts. Thank you for your consideration.

