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December 15, 2014

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Philip Hulbert
NYSDEC Division of Fish, Wildlife, and Marine Resources
625 Broadway, 5th floor
Albany, New York 12233-4753

RE: Comments on draft NYS Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan

Dear Philip Hulbert,

Protect the Adirondacks congratulates the Department of Environmental Conservation for promulgating a draft Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan. PROTECT was involved in drafting the AIS plan for the Adirondack Park more than 10 years ago and supports strong statewide action to stop the spread of AIS. This plan helped to build a network of educational program, direct management control efforts, early detection, and a rapid response system. This work likely helped to slow the spread of AIS in the Adirondack Park, yet much more needs to be done.

Special Focus on Adirondack Park, a Part of New York with Many Un-infested Lakes and Ponds: A focal point of the draft AIS Management Plan should be active support for those parts of New York that have somehow managed to remain largely free of AIS or have many water bodies with just one or two species. Many water bodies across New York are infested with a dozen or more AIS, but in the Adirondack Park we have many major water bodies that are free of AIS. The threat to the clean waters of the Adirondack Park is enormous.

According to the Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program (APIPP), 94 lakes are infested and 11 different AIS have been documented in Adirondack water bodies and it is believed that 16 lakes have two or more. Prospects for eradication of AIS from these waters are minimal.

AIS that infest water bodies in the Adirondack Park include Eurasian watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*), curly leaf pondweed (*Potamogeton crispus*), variable leaf milfoil (*Myriophyllum heterophyllum*), water chestnut (*Trapa natans*), zebra mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*), Asian clams (*Corbicula fluminea*), spiny water flea (*Bythotrephes longimanus*), brittle naiad (*Najas minor*), European frog-bit (*Hydrocharis morsus-ranae* L.), yellow floating heart (*Nymphoides peltata*), fanwort (*Cabomba*

caroliniana) and variable-leaf milfoil (*Myriophyllum heterophyllum*). Eurasian watermilfoil is the most widely spread AIS, believed to have infested over 50 lakes in the Adirondack Park.

The state acted to stop the sale of invasives in 2012. In 2014, DEC prohibited launching of AIS-infested boats at its boat launches and Governor Cuomo signed into law the first statewide prohibition on the transport of AIS. Now, we need a statewide inspection and decontamination system to support and fully effectuate all of these measures. This should be the focal point of the new AIS management plan.

Enhanced Focus on Prevention and Interdiction: As more lakes become infested with AIS costs of control efforts rise. AIS control is very expensive, often beyond the means on lake associations, local governments and limited funding from the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). Prevention and interdiction are far less expensive and will do much more to control the spread of AIS than the combined control and management efforts underway across New York.

The recent costs of unsuccessful control efforts on Lake George for the Asian clam (*Corbicula fluminea*) and for hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillata*) on Cayuga Lake show the high costs of control efforts. Over \$7 million has been spent to control AIS on Lake George and over \$1 million to control hydrilla in Cayuga Lake. Given this reality, New York needs to significantly improve its AIS prevention and interdiction infrastructure.

Many non-profits, local governments, and academic institutions, among others, have organized programs where Lake Stewards provide public information about the threats and hazards of AIS. Protect the Adirondacks is one of many organizations that manage such programs. The people and organizations on the front lines of AIS education believe that a new law that prohibits the launching of any boat that is not clean, drained and dry is badly needed and will help statewide efforts to control AIS. It is time to place greater emphasis on prevention and interdiction of AIS.

It is Time for Focus on Prevention and Interdiction, not Education: Mandatory boat inspection and decontamination programs should replace voluntary public education programs that have been managed at scores of boat launches around New York. These programs are beneficial, but do not involve more intensive inspection protocols linked to decontamination facilities. It's time to transition these public education programs, based largely on voluntary visual inspections of boats and education of boat owners, to a mandatory inspection and decontamination program. While most boat owners are supportive of AIS prevention, not all are. Furthermore, some of the most venal and destructive AIS are transferred as microscopic veligers or juveniles in the live wells, ballast and engine water. Only a systematic inspection and decontamination program can guard against these threats. Two of the newest AIS to invade Lake George arrived despite active public education efforts in operation at major boat launches. One of the major boat launch sites, with a robust public education effort, at the Norowal Marina is now area infested by Asian clams that likely arrived in the standing water on a boat. It's also important to note that other infested areas on Lake George are around private boat launches without high boat traffic to warrant a public education effort, but clearly enough traffic to begin new infestations.

The days of dirty boating must end. The protection of lakes, ponds, and rivers from AIS infestation will help the economy and quality of life of Upstate New York communities.

Boat Inspection and Decontamination Station Network Needed across Adirondack Park: NYS must help to build a comprehensive inspection and decontamination infrastructure across the state. A number of western states have set up such facilities at state highway rest areas. Willing partners exist across New York in the Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM). APIPP manages the Adirondack Park PRISM, one of eight statewide. This will involve building both statewide network of scores of decontamination stations and effectively policing public and private boat launches.

Motorboats Spread AIS: The main vector for spreading AIS throughout the Adirondacks and New York is the transport of motorboats for public recreation. 460,000 motorboats were registered in New York in 2012. Tens of thousands of boats are transported across New York for public recreation for use on many lakes, ponds, and rivers. AIS attaches to the engines, hulls, and trailers, among other places, and are carried from one lake to another. In juvenile stages, microscopic AIS animals, such as Asian clams, quagga mussels (*Dreissena bugensis*) and spiny water flea (*Bythotrephes longimanus*), are transported in standing ballast waters, engine water and in live wells and bait buckets.

Lake George and Lake Champlain were the first lakes infested with Eurasian watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) and curly leaf pondweed (*Potamogeton crispus*) in the 1980s. Their high popularity and high boat traffic, combined with the weak control efforts, resulted in spreading Eurasian watermilfoil throughout the Adirondacks. This same dynamic is at play once again, though the species have changed. The Asian clam and spiny water flea infestations in Lake George raises the likelihood that this invasive species will be transported from Lake George to other lakes and ponds throughout the Adirondacks. In Lake Tahoe, the Asian clam infestation has resulted in transforming once blue and sandy beaches into places littered with clams shells and often covered with thick wads of algae. We cannot let this happen in the Adirondacks.

Lake George Boat Control Program should be Replicated Across New York: The time for action is now. Upstate New York is often cited as an economically depressed area. Yet Upstate is an area rich in incredible lakes, ponds and rivers. The water quality of Upstate New York is vital to the local economies and supports a number of businesses, resorts, vacation homes, and high property values. AIS can rapidly change the ecology of a lake, wetland, pond or river as well as significantly impair and seriously diminish recreational enjoyment. A much greater investment is needed by New York State to prevent the spread of AIS in order to protect the Upstate economy, environment and quality of life.

Greater EPF Funding is Needed for AIS Management: Adequate, sustained funding is badly needed for AIS management. Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) funding at \$4.6 million annually is inadequate. A dedicated funding source is needed. Successful AIS control programs, such as seen on Upper Saranac Lake or on Lake Tahoe, are based on continuing efforts that are properly funded. Successful management and prevention programs are funded and operated annually so that there are no gaps in service, when AIS can rebound or be introduced.

Surcharge on Boat Registrations is Needed to Improve AIS Management: New York should pass an annual surcharge on boat registrations for a dedicated fund for AIS control as part of the Invasive Species account in the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). The states of Oregon, Minnesota, and Maine, among others, have successfully implemented AIS surcharges to boat registrations.

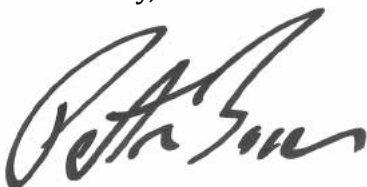
One way to boost funding for AIS control is to tax the vectors that spread AIS – motor-boats. The NYS 2012 Recreational Boating Report states “Recreational boating in New York State is a \$2 billion industry enjoyed by millions of residents and visitors alike. With nearly 460,000 registered powerboats and perhaps another 300,000 non-powered watercraft, New York ranks 7th in the nation for registered boats.” It should be noted that some states, like Ohio and Pennsylvania require registrations for canoes and kayaks that use state waters. A \$25 surcharge added to boat registrations in New would raise \$11.5 million dollars, which should be dedicated as an AIS management fund within the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). The current EPF level of support for aquatic and terrestrial invasive species control is completely inadequate, with just \$4.6 million dedicated annually (that’s \$75,000 per county, less than was spent to control AIS on Lake Placid).

These measures would significantly improve New York’s ability to manage AIS and protect New York’s waters.

Conclusion: New York faces a choice of action or continued loss. The many local efforts have helped to protect lakes, ponds and rivers in the face of dithering state agencies and state leaders. Much more needs to be done. The costs of inaction are much too high in the Adirondacks and across New York for rural economies, environmental health, and our quality of life. New York needs to become a national leader.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Protect the Adirondacks, please accept our gratitude for the opportunity to submit these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Bauer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and "B".

Peter Bauer
Executive Director