

NYSG Launch Stewards Engaging Public in Watercraft Inspection to Slow Spread of AIS

The New York Sea Grant (NYSG) Launch Stewards Program educates and empowers boaters in the effort to protect New York waters from aquatic invasive species (AIS).

AIS are non-native aquatic organisms that, when introduced into new waters, are likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health. AIS are well adapted for spreading throughout an ecosystem, limiting food and habitat for native species, and competing with or displacing them. Currently, there are believed to be more than 180 AIS in self-sustaining populations in the Great Lakes basin. Cost estimates of AIS impacts to the Great Lakes region exceed \$100 million annually.

Recreational boating is a key pathway for the spread of AIS to the inland lakes of the Great Lakes basin. Organisms, e.g., spiny water flea, Eurasian water-milfoil, and zebra and quagga mussels, can be transferred on boats and trailers. Motorized and non-motorized boaters can help prevent AIS spread from infested to uninfested waters by properly inspecting their watercraft and equipment for “hitchhikers” every time they enter and leave the water.

The NYSG Launch Stewards program educates recreational boaters on how to look for, remove and dispose of unwanted debris through voluntary watercraft inspections. The stewards offer the inspections throughout the summer at locations along the southern and eastern shores of Lake Ontario, Oneida Lake, and other inland waters.

By fostering awareness of the AIS issue, the stewards engage the boating public to become part of the

NYSG Launch Stewards Program Partners:

Finger Lakes-Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Great Lakes Protection Funds Program



NYSG Launch Steward Matt Brincka (right) guides a boater through proper watercraft inspection steps. Photo: Julia Gilbert

solution rather than extending the problem. NYSG is working with launch steward programs across the state to standardize steward training tools. To help boaters easily recognize stewards anywhere in New York, the stewards across the state are consistently using the national *Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers!* campaign messaging and branding.

In 2012, the NYSG Launch Stewards:

- monitored 12 launch sites
- educated 5,701 people
- conducted 2,456 watercraft inspections
 - 72% were NYS-registered boats
 - 10% of the boats had visible debris, e.g. Eurasian milfoil, water chestnut, curly leaf pond weed, algae.

Participating boaters indicated the educational outreach made them more aware of ways they can help limit the spread of AIS; 81% reported using preventative measures, e.g., inspecting/washing/drying boat, and draining bilge and bait buckets.

Simultaneously, the NYSG Launch Steward experience prepares the college student-stewards for future careers in the environmental field.

This project meets the performance goals of Sea Grant’s Healthy New York Coastal Ecosystems Focus Areas.

New York Sea Grant is a joint program of Cornell University, the State University of New York, and NOAA. New York Sea Grant Extension administration is located at 112 Rice Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853.

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