

Workforce Training Aids Aquatic Invasive Species Education

In the past 200 years, more than 180 aquatic invasive species (IS) have entered the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River ecosystems. IS are non-native species with the potential to cause harm to the local economy, environment, or human health. IS can outcompete similar native species because they lack natural predators, inhabit a variety of habitats, and have higher reproductive rates/success. IS establishment further degrades ecosystems by disrupting food webs and reducing biodiversity.

In 2011, New York Sea Grant created a workforce development training program to help educate future members of the environmental sector. These trainees helped educate New York's Great Lakes stakeholders about IS and the importance of healthy coastal ecosystems.

NYSG's Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Resource Educator Program (REP) created two seasonal positions that provided AIS materials to stakeholders, and K-12 educators and students in the Eastern Lake Ontario region. The AIS REP created an education series: Know Your Natives (<http://www.seagrant.sunysb.edu/articles/t/publication-series-native-or-invasive-aquatic-invasive-species-news>), attended resource-related events and workshops, offered public education programs, and completed IS inventory and control work.



NYSG AIS Resource Educator Greg Chapman (left) examines aquatic species with Salmon River Guide and local citizen at a July 2011 water chestnut pull. Photo: Stacy Furgal, NYSG

The 2011 NYSG AIS REP successfully provided AIS information to more than 1,500 stakeholders, 13 K-12 educators, and nearly 170 K-12 students. In addition to information dissemination, the REP inventoried select public use properties, seven bodies of water (covering ~46 linear miles), more than 300 invasive species populations, and uploaded data to the NYS iMapInvasives database.

With local partners, NYSG's REP canvassed and restored (as needed) four acres of the Salmon River (Oswego County, NY) against the invasive water chestnut.

With Great Lakes Initiative funding, NYSG partnered with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Finger Lakes-Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance, Oswego County Soil & Water Conservation District, and St. Lawrence-Eastern Lake Ontario Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management to successfully implement this project.

AIS Resource Educators Stacy Furgal, holding an invasive fish specimen, and Greg Chapman, with a handful of water chestnut nutlets, engaged the public at events. Photo: Kara Lynn Dunn

This project meets the performance measures of Sea Grant's Healthy New York Coastal Ecosystems focus area.

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