

Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5525 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING A RAPID RESPONSE PROGRAM FOR CERTAIN
Title: AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES.

Vote Date: 3/18/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/13/2026

File No.:

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Environment Committee

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Rep. William Heffernan, 115th Dist.
Rep. Kaitlyn Shake, 120th Dist.
Rep. Michael "MJ" Shannon, 117th Dist.
Sen. Stephen G. Harding, 30th Dist.
Sen. Martha Marx, 20th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

The purpose of this bill is to establish a rapid response program and protocol for the elimination and containment of hydrilla and other aquatic invasive species in the state.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Katie Dykes, Commissioner, CT Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEE)

DEEP supports the intent of this bill but has concerns regarding the resource-intensive nature of several proposals. For example, creating a task force, education efforts, and constructing boat wash stations at all boat launches to name a few. DEEP also has concerns that some proposals in the bill could conflict with existing statutory requirements and processes. The

provision authorizing the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station Office of Aquatic Invasive Species to conduct herbicide treatments may conflict with existing statutes requiring pesticide certification. Finally, the requirement that hydrilla be treated by September 15 may not be practical.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Paul Aresta, Executive Director, Council on Environmental Quality

The Council supports the concept of DEEP to provide boat washing station, educational signs, and other tools to combat hydrilla. The Council thinks that the provision to require the Office of Aquatic Invasive Species (OAIS) to research certain invasive species be extended to all species that are likely to be present within the “scientifically determined radius.” The Council has concerns regarding the provision on herbicide application. They suggest refinement of the proposed legislation including the addition of a requirement for DEEP and the OAIS to examine the potential direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts that each control method might have on the environment and public health when developing the state’s rapid response protocol.

Jason White, Director, Office of Aquatic Invasive Species, Department of Environmental Science and Forestry, CT Agricultural Experiment Station

The Office of Aquatic Invasive Species, established within the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station supports this bill. Out of the other states in New England, 60% of CT waterbodies contain at least one invasive species. Compared to the next highest New England state, Massachusetts, which has 33% of waterbodies with invasive species. Hydrilla poses a threat not only to CT, but to the region. Hydrilla fragments have been spotted on boats in Vermont that had recently been in the CT River. Prevention and rapid response is the most effective and cost effective strategies in managing invasive species. Hydrilla discovered in the CT River in 2016 represents a subspecies previously undocumented in North America. This species now occupies thousand acres in the lower portion of the Connecticut River from Agawam, Massachusetts to Essex, Connecticut, and has spread to eleven known lakes and ponds within the state. Delayed response to hydrilla results in higher management costs and increased ecological damage. To prevent the spread, new infestations should be targeted with herbicide applications before reproductive structures have developed. Prevention like boat washing stations and education of the public are also critical in preventing the spread of hydrilla. The Office of Aquatic Invasive Species is prepared to assist rapid response efforts by:

1. Confirming reports of hydrilla through field verification and genetic analysis.
2. Surveying and mapping hydrilla, or other newly introduced aquatic invasive species, within affected waterbodies.
3. Documenting the presence, location, and extent of relevant threatened and endangered plant species within a scientifically determined radius, established in consultation with the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) Natural Diversity Data Base (NDDDB) program.
4. Coordinating or conducting rapid response control measures for new, localized hydrilla populations using best management practices by the end of the growing season.
5. Conducting post-treatment surveys and making all data, maps, and reports publicly available on our website for members of the public and the Aquatic Invasive Species Task Force to access.
6. Working closely with CT DEEP and other partners on an Interagency Aquatic Invasive Species Task Force to develop a state rapid response protocol for hydrilla and a state-wide aquatic invasive species management plan.

The Office of Aquatic Invasive Species supports all subsections of this bill. We respectfully recommend a few minor clarifications. The Office

of Aquatic Invasive Species supports all subsections of this bill. We respectfully recommend a few minor clarifications. 1. The bill should include the full reference to the “Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station” when referring to the Office of Aquatic Invasive Species. 2. Within subsection (e) (1), change “on or before the next occurring September fifteenth” to “within the calendar year”. 3. Within subsection (g) (1), change “the director of the Office of Aquatic Invasive Species” to “the Director of the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station”. 4. Lastly, we recommend changing all mentions of “boat washing stations” to “watercraft inspection and decontamination stations”

James Beradino, Legislative Director, Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST)

COST supports this bill because it is paramount for a municipality to respond to hydrilla as quickly as possible. This bill would expedite the permitting process, allowing a speedy response to hydrilla, thus containing it. If left untreated, hydrilla can create a financial and environmental problem. The benefits of treating hydrilla early are improved water quality, economic savings, enhanced recreational opportunities, protection of native species, reduced navigational hazards, and positive public perception.

Alicea Charamut, Executive Director, Rivers Alliance of Connecticut

Rivers Alliance of Connecticut supports this bill because there is only a narrow window when hydrilla is first established that it can be stopped from spreading. Otherwise, it will grow out of control and form dense mats. After this happens, management costs increase dramatically. That is why it is important to expedite permits, as well as having OAIS map newly discovered infestations. Rivers Alliance also supports the creation of an interagency task force to establish a statewide rapid response protocol and develop a broader aquatic invasive species management plan. Currently, efforts to deal with hydrilla are often thwarted due to lack of resources. A successful rapid response framework must be paired with adequate funding, scientific capacity, and coordinated oversight if it is to deliver the outcomes envisioned by this legislation.

John Ely, Executive Director, Project Oceanology

Project Oceanology supports this bill because it aligns with the goals of the Long Island Sound Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). Aquatic invasive species are a threat to marine and freshwater ecosystems throughout the Long Island Sound watershed. Invasive species can alter food webs and impact fisheries. Preventing the spread of these species helps maintain the long-term health of the Long Island Sound.

Nathan Frohling, The Director of External Affairs, The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy supports this bill because hydrilla has become a significant problem in Connecticut. Specifically the Connecticut River strain, which grows rapidly and outcompetes native species. It forms dense mats that impede recreational use of the waterway. Some marinas have reported they can no longer access their docks because it is so thick. However, a concern they have is that DEEP does not have the funding to carry out the provisions in this bill.

Elizabeth Gara, Executive Director, Connecticut Water Works Association (CWWA)

CWWA supports this bill as invasive aquatic species cause problems for public drinking water. They increase operational costs by clogging infrastructure and having to treat the water.

Sam Gold, Executive Director, Lower Connecticut River Valley of Governments (RiverCOG)

RiverCOG supports this bill because hydrilla has impacted the Lower Connecticut River Valley the most. This area of the river is the states preeminent environmental and recreational resource, as well as the areas public drinking water. In the near term, it is essential that DEEP be able to expediate permits for rapid response. The rapid response take force should also have the ability to coordinate across state boundaries and throughout New England and New York to develop rapid response protocols and funding mechanisms and opportunities.

Senator Stephen Harding, Senate Minority Leader, Senate Republican Office

Senator Harding supports this bill because the lakes in CT's 30th Senate District are a vital resource, and hydrilla poses a threat to them. Lake Associations and municipalities already devote significant resources to monitoring and managing hydrilla. However, once it becomes established, it becomes nearly impossible to eradicate. A coordinated response team would allow state and local officials to act quickly and contain the spread of hydrilla.

Representative Renee LaMark Muir, State of Connecticut, 36th District

Representative LaMark Muir supports this bill because hydrilla is becoming a growing threat in the Lower Connecticut River Valley. The new strain, discovered in 2016, has now been detected in about 65% of waterbodies. Hydrilla can damage floodplains and could severely affect the tourism industry. In 2024, recreational activities in CT waterbodies generated \$9.4 billion. Hydrilla will affect tourism and recreation, which would lead to less economic output.

The following individuals and organizations also expressed support for this bill.

Edgar Berner, Chairman, Lake Waramaug Authority

James Brinton, First Selectman, Town of Washington

Antonia Bryson, Chair, Wild and Scenic Rivers Council

Martha Carter, President, Columbia Lake Association

Maggie Favretti, Co-Leadership Boarch Chair, Alliance for the Mystic River Watershed

James Fischer, President, Connecticut Federation of Lakes

Alan Siniscalchi, President, Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions, Inc (CACIWC)

62 Citizens Also Expressed Support

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

James Ryan, Concern citizen

James opposes this bill because it weakens critical environmental safeguards, reduces public oversight, and prioritizes the risk of chemical herbicide treatment without sufficient ecological review. First, the bill removes existing notification requirements for waterfront property owners before herbicide treatments occur. Second, the bill repeatedly authorizes expedited permitting for herbicide application. Accelerated permitting may reduce the time available for scientific evaluation of ecological impacts. Aquatic herbicides used to control hydrilla—including compounds such as fluridone, diquat, and endothall-can have non-target effects on native aquatic vegetation and phytoplankton communities. Third, the bill creates a statutory expectation that hydrilla populations be treated with herbicides by a specific deadline. While early intervention is important, rigid treatment deadlines risk prioritizing chemical control even

when alternative management approaches may be more appropriate. Fourth, the bill provides only a 200-foot buffer between herbicide treatments and public drinking water sources. Hydrological studies demonstrate that contaminants introduced into surface waters can disperse beyond immediate application zones through mixing, groundwater interaction, and sediment transport. Finally, the bill allows state agencies to coordinate and conduct treatments within the same season once expedited permits are issued. Decisions involving chemical inputs to aquatic environments should incorporate transparent review, public participation, and site-specific ecological assessment rather than relying primarily on accelerated administrative authority.

Reported by: Henry Russell

Date: 03/25/2026