

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH
PUBLIC ACT SUMMARY



PA 26-65—HB 5525

Environment Committee

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

SUMMARY: This act outlines certain rapid response actions and associated timeframes to eradicate, contain, or control hydrilla or other aquatic invasive plant species introduced into an ecosystem or waterbody, while the infestation remains localized. It also requires the Connecticut Agriculture Experiment Station's Office of Aquatic Invasive Species (O AIS), in consultation with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), to develop a state rapid response plan for hydrilla.

Under the act, O AIS must set rapid response qualification criteria for (1) newly discovered aquatic invasive species and (2) hydrilla, including satellite populations, discovered within the last three years. O AIS must list qualifying species on the agency's website and notify DEEP when it adds a new species.

The act also requires O AIS, in consultation with DEEP, to develop a publicly accessible statewide aquatic invasive species management plan. To do so, O AIS may consult other entities, including the state's Invasive Plants Council, through a public comment period.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

RAPID RESPONSE ACTIONS AND TIMEFRAMES

The act requires O AIS to identify new introductions of aquatic invasive plant species, including hydrilla. In doing so, O AIS must (1) map the extent and location of these populations and (2) document the presence and location of relevant threatened or endangered species within a scientifically determined radius set in consultation with DEEP's Natural Diversity Data Base program. O AIS must also determine how sensitive any identified threatened or endangered species is to proposed herbicide treatments and other containment or eradication methods. The act allows O AIS to coordinate and conduct rapid response actions for any new population in a Connecticut waterbody.

Under the act, any rapid response actions for newly introduced aquatic invasive plant species must be timed, based on best available science, to occur before or during key reproductive periods to minimize their establishment and secondary spread.

The act requires (1) DEEP to expedite permitting for rapid response actions for aquatic invasive species that O AIS identifies as qualifying, as well as hydrilla, and (2) the Department of Public Health to coordinate with DEEP to specify conditions for permits to treat aquatic invasive species in a public supply watershed or within 200 feet of a public water supply well. It also exempts any rapid response herbicide

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treatment from existing provisions requiring two individual notices to privately owned lake or pond waterfront property owners. Instead, the act requires that notice be made by telephone, personal notification, or conspicuous posting on a home's entry door at least 24 hours before the treatment.

HYDRILLA RAPID RESPONSE PROTOCOL

The act requires OAIS, in consultation with DEEP, to also develop a state rapid response protocol for hydrilla. The protocol must define the roles, responsibilities, and response actions for OAIS and DEEP. The protocol must establish a coordinated framework for interagency response that identifies lead and supporting functions and outlines next steps to contain or eradicate hydrilla. The steps may include (1) public education and outreach, (2) containment strategies, (3) treatment methods and associated timelines, and (4) any additional actions DEEP and OAIS determine are necessary.

Under the protocol, DEEP must issue expedited permits for rapid responses, and OAIS must be authorized to coordinate or conduct treatment within the same season the expedited permitting occurs. Additionally, OAIS must monitor the protocol's progress and track outcomes in a specific population and waterbody. The protocol may also serve as a template for responding to future introductions of other aquatic invasive species.