



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR
Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara: 3rd Annual 'Invasive Species Awareness Week' critical to overall effort to address challenge

THOMAS F. O'MARA July 12, 2016

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Elmira, N.Y., July 12— State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats), chairman of the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee, today praised the state's 3rd Annual **"Invasive Species Awareness Week"** this week, July 10-16, as an important piece of New York's overall strategy to combat the spread of invasive species across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and statewide.

He encouraged area residents to find out more and, in particular, singled out the danger of aquatic invasive species.

“The uncontrolled spread of aquatic invasive species like Hydrilla and Eurasian water milfoil can devastate regional tourism economies and cost local communities hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of jobs,” said O’Mara. “We’ve appreciated the **hard work of local leaders and concerned citizens throughout the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions**, and statewide, to protect our waterways and secure their quality and economic potential for generations to come. And we’re grateful to concerned boaters and outdoor industry leaders like Cabela’s and Bass Pro for their efforts as a first line of defense against the spread of aquatic invasive species. We’re hopeful that stepped-up state awareness, assistance and investment, and other ongoing efforts, will continue to make a difference.”

Some estimates have pegged the annual cost of invasive species to the national economy at \$120 billion a year.

In 2014, O’Mara and Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton (D-Ithaca) sponsored a new law (**S7851/A9619, Chapter 330 of the Laws of 2014**) which fully took effect earlier this year when the state **Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) issued final rules for boaters** to take precautions to prevent the spread of invasive species, such as removing all visible plants and animals from, or washing, draining and drying both motorized and non-motorized watercraft and related gear when entering and leaving a launch site.

O’Mara said that the law he sponsored mirrors similar efforts being undertaken across the country, as well as by major outdoor outfitters such as Cabela’s and Bass Pro, to help educate boaters on clean, drain and dry procedures to prevent the spread of invasive species from one body of water to another.

In May, **O’Mara announced that the Keuka Lake Association and Cornell University** were among 24 organizations statewide selected to share approximately \$2 million in the first round of funding through a new state grant program created as part of this year’s state budget to assist new, enhanced efforts to combat aquatic invasive species by focusing on boater awareness and education. The new invasive species grants, which O’Mara and his colleagues in the Senate Majority prioritized during this year’s budget negotiations, will go to municipalities, not-for-profits and higher educational programs focusing on the uniform training of boat stewards statewide, the placement of boat stewards, and the installation of decontamination stations. The grants will be provided through the state’s Environmental Protection Fund (EPF).

The 24 projects being awarded the first grants through the New York Aquatic Invasive Species Spread Prevention Grant Program focus on expanding and strengthening boat steward programs statewide. Boat stewards work to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species by delivering spread prevention education and outreach, conducting courtesy boat and trailer inspections, and showing boaters how to inspect and remove plants and organisms from their boats, trailers and other equipment.

New York State is home to more than 7,600 freshwater lakes, ponds and reservoirs, as well as 70,000 miles of rivers, brooks and streams. Consequently, O'Mara said, the state is particularly at-risk to the introduction of aquatic invasive species.