

National Invasive Species Awareness Week

Thursday, March 3rd, 2022

10:00 am - 11:00 am central

Managing the Hydrilla River Infestation in the Connecticut River



Event Summary:

The Connecticut River is a critical water resource in the northeastern US with unique habitats and wildlife impacted by an aggressive invasion of a novel biotype of the submersed exotic aquatic plant, *Hydrilla verticillata*. *Hydrilla* is on the Federal Noxious Weed List and is considered the worst aquatic invasive plant in the US. The extensive (70+ mile) hydrilla infestation in the Connecticut River poses a serious risk to other waterways in the Northeast and especially the Great Lakes. Initial federal funding proposals (Sen. Blumenthal – CT) to contain the hydrilla infestation and work towards restoration of the river call for \$25M annually for four years through the US Army Corps of Engineers Aquatic Plant Control Program, the nation's only federally authorized program for the research and development of effective, science-based strategies to manage invasive aquatic weeds. This event will present the local impacts of the infestation on the ecology and uses of the river, risks of regional and national spread, and integrated management options to contain the hydrilla invasion and work towards restoration. Presentations will be made by the following contributors providing national, regional, and local perspectives.

Agenda:

10:00 am - Welcome by Elizabeth Brown, Director of Government Relations and Professional Development for the [North American Invasive Species Management Association](#) (NAISMA)

10:05 am - History of the hydrilla invasion in the U.S. and risks from this new invasion in the Connecticut River by Ian Pfingsten, US Geological Survey and Co-Chair of NE Aquatic Nuisance Species Panel

10:15 am - What's at Stake: the Local Perspective by Judy Preston, Connecticut Sea Grant

11:25 am - Steve Gephard, Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (retired)

11:35 am - Dr. Rob Richardson, North Carolina State University and Past President of the Aquatic Plant Management Society

11:45 pm - Moderated Q&A Session

11:58 pm - Conclusion - Elizabeth Brown, NAISMA

12:00 pm - Adjournment

Presenter Bios:

Ian Pfingsten, US Geological Survey

Ian is a botanist for the U.S. Geological Survey Nonindigenous Aquatic Species database tasked with tracking and reporting the distribution of aquatic species within the U.S. and its territories, of which over 200 are aquatic plants. He works in Gainesville, FL with biologists that specialize in aquatic animals. Prior to this, Ian studied plant population dynamics driven by climate, fire, flood, and grazing in Florida, Oregon, and Washington.

Judy Preston, Connecticut Sea Grant

Judy Preston has been working in the environmental field doing community-based conservation and consulting in Connecticut for over twenty-five years. For the past 12 years she has been the Connecticut public engagement and outreach Coordinator for the Long Island Sound Study (a National Estuary Program) through the UConn Sea Grant Program. Judy worked in the for-profit sector as a geologist in Denver, Colorado before joining the Nature Conservancy in Connecticut as Director of Science and Stewardship. She founded and directed Tidewater Institute, a community-based conservation organization in the Connecticut River estuary, that included a collaboration with the Regional Planning Agency to survey the lower River for the then nascent population of aquatic invasive water chestnut (*Trapa natans*). She has taught environmental science and landscape ecology as an adjunct faculty member at Three Rivers Community College for eight years. Judy has a BA in Geology from Skidmore College; an MS in Botany from the University of Vermont, and a Masters in Environmental Management from Yale University.

Stephen Gephard, Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (retired)

Steve Gephard is a professional fish biologist working as an independent consultant having retired from the Connecticut DEEP's Fisheries Division after a 42-year career. During this time, he supervised the Diadromous (Migratory) Fish Program and the Habitat Conservation and Enhancement Program. Steve continues to be active in the field, working for NOAA-Fisheries in support of the endangered Atlantic salmon, participating on regional committees, and holding a Presidential Appointment as a U.S. Commissioner to the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization. He has had a relationship with the Connecticut River his entire life, starting as a young naturalist and boater in the early 1960s. He is currently a trustee of the Connecticut River Conservancy, the nation's oldest watershed association.

Dr. Rob Richardson, NC State University and Past President of the Aquatic Plant Management Society

Dr. Richardson's appointment as Aquatic and Non-Cropland Weed Scientist in the Department of Crop Science is 60% research and 40% extension. The primary responsibility is aquatic weed management and secondarily invasive plant management in non-cropland. His position is critical for development of integrated and sustainable weed management programs for reservoirs, lakes, ponds, other bodies of water, and non-cropland in North Carolina and the surrounding region. Dr. Richardson focuses on managing vegetation in an environmentally sound manner to improve or maintain fish and wildlife habitat, improve biological diversity, and reduce the size and scope of alien plant invasions.