



WHY SHOULD VERMONT INSTITUTE AN AIS DECAL?

1. What is the goal of a Vermont AIS Decal?

- Invasive species are “non-native (or alien) to the ecosystem under consideration and whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health” (1999 Executive Order 13112). They are a biological pollutants. Extremely difficult if not impossible to contain, control, or eradicate, they can interfere with our ability to enjoy lakes and rivers. Aquatic invasive species (AIS) have little fanfare from a Vermont public and state standpoint, despite a 1978 Vermont law intended to address this critical issue ([10 V.S.A. Chapter 50](#)).
- Requiring all motorboats, in and out of state, to purchase and display an aquatic invasive species decal annually could be a source of needed revenues on the local level to control and prevent aquatic AIS. Such a requirement also presents a needed opportunity to educate about *all* aquatic nuisances (defined in [10 V.S.A. § 1452](#) as *undesirable or excessive substances or populations that interfere with the recreational potential or aquatic habitat of a body of water, including rooted aquatic plants and animal and algal populations*)
- Educating *all* users of Vermont water bodies about aquatic invasive species, especially transporting recreational boats from one lake to another - Vermonters and visitors alike – as well as instilling environmental stewardship is paramount to preserving these important aquatic resources for current and future generations.
- Protecting and conserving the long-term health of Vermont's water bodies and the continued enjoyment of these resources lie at the heart of existing statutes and many state programs. These programs are necessary to ensure Vermont's citizens, current and future generations, have clean water.
- Aquatic invasive species can "hitchhike" from one body of water to another by attaching to portions of a boat (e.g., hull, rudder, anchor, motor), trailer, equipment, or gear; or carried in the boat bilge, a ballast tank or a live well. Overland transport of trailered recreational watercraft and other water-related recreational or commercial equipment by humans is a primary vector in the spread of aquatic invasive species. Despite educational initiatives, many boaters have yet to adopt consistent and effective aquatic invasive species cleaning habits. Preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species via watercraft and associated equipment should remain a top priority for protecting Vermont waters.
- Ultimately, volunteers bear the task and burden of protecting our waters from this biological pollutant, and current resources are inadequate for effective management and spread prevention.
- When water bodies contain multiple aquatic invasive species, the challenges of implementing action and maintaining long-term management with limited resources become even more complex and formidable.



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- A new revenue source is needed, especially in light of 2021 VTDEC reports of declining revenues expected in 2022 to fund the ANC Grant-in-Aid municipal grants program ([10 V.S.A. § 1458](#)) and pandemic pressure on Vermont municipalities.

2. Why do you think an AIS decal is needed and will make a difference?

- The spread of aquatic invasive species is an issue of national significance: aquatic invasive species are rising and moving faster due to human travel and global trade and transport. The subsequent ecological and economic impacts on industry, recreation, and the environment are costly and can be irreversible. Management is expensive and complicated, and, for some species, no control measures exist.
- According to [VT Invasives](#), “In Vermont alone, over a million dollars are spent annually on spread prevention, monitoring, and control projects for exotic aquatic pests.”
- Aquatic invasive species are one of the top risks to natural resources globally, and few places are spared the impact of these species. Vermont has far too much at stake from aquatic invasive species to jeopardize the successful work done by so many. It is critical to have a dedicated state-level program with adequate staff and resources. Education on the state and regional level motivates and leads to voluntary compliance for equipment decontamination; a robust citizen science program to further aquatic invasive species management efforts; environmental stewardship; and awareness of new threats from emerging invasive species.
- The burden of aquatic invasive species management - education, spread prevention, rapid response, control – is labor-intensive, must be repeated and costly to implement. In Vermont, lake and watershed associations bear the burden of these efforts. State, federal, and municipal funding rarely address the actual need. We believe current resources are inadequate to support *and* sustain aquatic invasive species' biological pollution management work in Vermont. i.e., a percentage of MBR annual registrations to award grants to municipalities ([10 V.S.A. § 1458](#)) supplemented with federal Army Corps of Engineer funds; Lake Champlain Basin Program grants; municipal dollars; and lake and watershed association contributions.
- Lake and watershed associations exist to protect and preserve the associated resource. These groups are passionate about the resources they are trying to protect. Given adequate resources, they will continue these efforts. Without sufficient resources, they will likely fail.

3. What is the demand for state ANC Grant in Aid funding now, and what is the typical state funding to support the program? Where do those funds come from?

- According to Oliver Pierson, VTDEC Lakes and Ponds Management and Protection Program (Lakes) Manager, 10/31/21 to the Federation of Vermont Lakes and Ponds (FOVLAP) Board:



“State funding: Approximately \$450,000, with \$250,000 coming from previous year [Motorboat Registration Fund (MBR)] revenue, \$100,000 from the US Army Corps of Engineers Award for Water Chestnut and Eurasian Water Milfoil Control, and \$100,000 from the MBR surplus, which is rapidly dwindling. Our MBR Revenue breaks down as follows: 20% of the total MBR is for ANC Grants which is \$248K in SFY21. We also get 17% of the total MBR for ANC Program Administration, roughly \$210K, which we use to cover some staff salary costs; both are involved in the Aquatic Nuisance Control effort.

The one-time AIS surplus is being used up quickly as we use MBR to put out \$350K of grants annually (plus another \$100K from Army Corps funds to bring annual grant total to \$450K) and to pay some program management costs; these costs exceed the annual amount we receive from Motorboat Registration Fees which is why we are eating into the surplus. 2022 will be the last year under current funding that VTDEC can fund AIS grants at a level of \$450,000 per year. Normally, 75% of the money for grants comes from [MBR], but a portion of that money can also be used for administration, and since the pandemic started, DEC has been using the allowable amount of MBR fees to cover staff salaries working on aquatic nuisance control. The \$450,000 total grant award for 2020-2022 will decrease to only \$250,000 - \$350,000 for grants in 2023. There is a marked increase in application ANC grants and overall grant amounts will dwindle quickly since more people are asking for the same size pie. Now all grant applications projects receive some funding, but with decreased money available, grant funding may become more competitive and only certain applications will be funded. The decal idea could be a new source of revenue but would probably not cover the \$100,000 to \$200,000 gap.”

- According to Kim Jensen, VTDEC Lakes Aquatic Invasive Species Program, in SFY2020, the request by municipalities and other groups for ANC Grant-in-Aid funding was approximately \$2.1M and in SFY2021, approximately \$1.8M.

- Per 23 V.S.A. § 3319, funds from the Motorboat Registration Fund are allocated as follows:

10% to the Department of Public Safety to be used for enforcement of this subchapter and implementation of a boating safety education program.

34 % to the Department of Fish and Wildlife to be used to match federal funds; for upgrading and expanding boating access areas and facilities located at those areas; for developing and constructing new boating access areas; and for facilitating or establishing and maintaining pump out stations, which may be, in the discretion of the Commissioner, constructed or operated either by the Department or on a contractual basis by a private person or entity. Users shall be charged reasonable and appropriate fees.

17% to the Department of Environmental Conservation for the purpose of aquatic nuisance control pursuant to 10 V.S.A. chapter 50.



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7% to the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets for the purpose of mosquito control pursuant to 6 V.S.A. chapter 85.

20 % to the Department of Environmental Conservation for the purpose of an Aquatic Nuisance Control Grant Program pursuant to 10 V.S.A. chapter 50.

12% to the Transportation Fund.

- Governor Scott addressed attendees at FOVLAP's July 2020 annual meeting. FOVLAP requested the following from the Governor:
"Governor Scott, as you are aware, Vermont water bodies have been negatively impacted by aquatic invasive species that have entered our state. These are a form of biological pollution with significant adverse impacts on the environment, our economy, and even the health and well-being of both Vermonters and our visitors...The Federation of Vermont Lakes and Ponds seeks your support to fully fund existing grant programs, the State's Lakes and Ponds Program, and this Federation's and others' efforts to manage aquatic invasive species. We seek your support in helping us continue to protect and preserve Vermont's precious aquatic resources for this and for future generations to come."

4. Is an AIS Decal connected to a response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Seeking relief from COVID-19 isolation and social restrictions, many individuals headed outdoors to enjoy natural resources closer to home. The Lake Champlain Basin Program's Lake Steward Program documented an increase in boats coming through staffed Lake Champlain accesses in 2020 vs. 2019.
- In testimony before the House Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife Committee, Department of Forest Parks and Recreation Commissioner Michael Snyder mentions the coronavirus, the resulting shutdown [Governor Scott's State of Emergency declared, March 13, 2020, and addendum of March 24, 2020, "[Stay Home and Stay Safe](#)" order] and a pent up eagerness for people to get outside during the pandemic. Commissioner Snyder reported on the explosion and diversity of use, including new people using the outdoors in new ways. Parks needed to update facilities and expand parking to accommodate the impacts and pressure of heavy visitor use and congestion, including "astronomical use" at Lake Willoughby. (1-08-2021 House Natural Resources Fish and Wildlife Committee hearing <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FaCKQUYK4vI> on ANR department usage of expenditures allotted from 2020 Cares Act for Covid-19 relief)

Note: There are 140 state parks in Vermont, 70 located on waterbodies and 10 with maintained public boat accesses.



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- “The state of Vermont saw record-breaking participation in outdoor recreation activities and use of Vermont State Parks in 2020. Our parks welcomed well over 1 million visitors, the highest visitation rate since 1988 and the fifth-highest in Vermont’s history,”
Michael Snyder, Chair of the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative and Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, 18 November 2021
- [New national and state data](#) released by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) on the economic impact of outdoor recreation in 2020 confirms that Vermont’s outdoor sector remained a significant driver of the state’s economy, both during and after the onset of the COVID pandemic.
- According to the BEA data that measures spending generated by activities from snow sports to fishing, camping, hiking, boating, and bicycling, BEA ranked the contribution of Vermont’s outdoor recreation to state gross domestic product (GDP) as the 3rd highest in the nation in 2020, only a slight drop from its position as the 2nd highest state in 2019 at 5.2%. (<https://fpr.vermont.gov/news/federal-data-outdoor-recreation-sector-vermont-2020>)
- 2021 Lake Champlain Basin Program Boat Launch Steward data:
 - total # of inspections** = 11,612 surveys with a sum of 12,523 watercrafts
 - total # of boater interactions** = 11,612 surveys with a sum of 26,200 for group size
 - total # of decontaminations** = 196 (aka, 196 surveys indicated that a decontamination was performed. One survey could contain multiple watercrafts being deconned, ex. group of kayaks.)
 - total number of organism interceptions** = 1,666 (aka 1,666 surveys had an organism detected, not just AIS. 281 on launch and 1385 on retrieve)
 - total number of AIS interceptions** = 829 (aka 829 surveys had an AIS detected. 119 on launch and 710 on retrieve)

5. Why now? What makes this an issue that the Vermont legislature should address?

- Aquatic invasive species are a significant concern for our freshwater lakes and rivers. Any hope of achieving effective control takes resources as they can spread rapidly into new locations through numerous pathways, primarily through transient recreational boats moving between water bodies. Lakes frequently visited by boaters, especially after the boat last accessed an infested waterbody, have a far greater chance of being infected and becoming the source of new invasions because invaders “hitch-hike” from one body of water to another.
- Preventing new introductions of aquatic invasive species into Vermont waters before they cause substantial environmental and economic impacts is a concern for Vermonters and visitors alike. If populations of aquatic invasive species are left unchecked or additional aquatic invasive species enter Vermont



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- and spread, current levels of impact will only increase, amplifying the likelihood and seriousness of further spread.
- Resource managers and citizen scientists generally locate aquatic invasive species populations *after* they have already taken hold.
- Public health and safety are also a concern. Zebra mussels, for example, can potentially facilitate the cycling of heavy metals and other toxins into aquatic food webs, ultimately resulting in increased exposure to humans. (http://www.lcbp.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/ANS_Mgmt_Plan_2005Final.pdf)
- From the Lake Champlain Basin Program, “Vermont has recently established or revised rules that give the State’s resource managers considerable legal authority in preventing the introduction and spread of ANS. Where necessary laws exist, active ANS transport enforcement has been minimal. For ANS laws to be effective, greater efforts need to be taken throughout Vermont to inform both the public and law enforcement officials of them. Law enforcement officials must be encouraged to enforce the laws, and the public needs to be encouraged to voluntarily comply with the laws to protect Vermont’s water resources.” http://www.lcbp.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/ANS_Mgmt_Plan_2005Final.pdf
- The National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA) announced [on June 10, 2021] **continued momentum of boat sales and boating demand propelled by the COVID-19 pandemic**. New boat sales, which [reached a 13-year high in 2020](http://www.nmma.org/press/article/23687), remain at elevated levels – with sales through March 2021 up 30% compared to the 2020 average; demand is at an all-time high as Americans take to the water in record numbers and dealers are selling new boats as fast as they receive them at the start of peak boating season. (<http://www.nmma.org/press/article/23687>)
- Retail unit sales of new powerboats in the U.S. reached a 13-year high in 2020 with nearly 320,000 units sold, up 13% compared to 2019 – levels the recreational boating industry has not seen since before the Great Recession in 2008. Fishing-boat sales were up 10.3 percent in 2020, the highest annual total since 2007. (<http://www.nmma.org/press/article/23687>)

6. Who might support an AIS Decal?

Vermont lake associations and watershed groups

FOVLAP (Pat Suozzi, President)

Municipalities

VTANR and VTDMV

NHDES (Amy Smagula, Limnologist/Exotic Species Program Coordinator)

MEDEP (John McPhedran, Biologist, Invasive Aquatic Species Program)

LCBP (Meg Modley, Aquatic Invasive Species Management Coordinator)



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watercraft rental businesses and lodging facilities on or adjacent to water bodies
boaters, in state and out of state
VT Audubon Society
VT Sierra Club
VT Center for Ecostudies
Governor Scott

“We’re committed to restoring and protecting our lakes and rivers, which will cost Vermonters nearly \$1 billion over the next 20 years...and my budget will propose a long-term funding source for our water quality initiatives, using existing revenues and a new delivery model to put this money to work on the ground.”

10 January 2019 Inaugural Address

“We have a big job ahead of us, but a brighter future is within our grasp: The best education system in the country; resilient kids and thriving families; clean water, and a healthier planet; strong communities with good jobs, affordable homes, and vibrant downtowns in every corner of our state.”

5 January 2022 State of the State Address

7. Who might not support an AIS Decal?

Low-income Vermonters, e.g., BIPOC Vermont citizens

VTDMV - added programs and costs to implement

Enforcement officers – added enforcement work

VT State Parks – a burden to register for stickers for boat rentals at State Parks (Assume they would be exempt from the fee?)

VTANR - signage burdens, both cost and installation

Watercraft rental businesses – registration and a financial burden (Could these entities be required to register but be exempt from the fee? This is the case in Oregon; see [here](#).)

Out of staters burdened with sticker purchase

Anyone that sees this as a nuisance fee/burden and does not see the long term, broad aperture from aquatic invasive species invasions - public health threats; loss of aesthetic beauty of freshwater, wildlife habitat, property values and the tax base; the desire to attract new residents, support tourism and grow the economy; the significance of the environmental threats; ecosystem impairment; and water quality degradation.

8. If an AIS Decal becomes required in Vermont, how will we know it is having its intended benefit; what will be different and for whom?

Vermont could expect:

- long-term existing municipal aquatic invasive species management programs, as well as the development of new programs
- a decrease in new aquatic invasive species infestations as control and spread prevention programs (e.g., public access greeter programs) increase



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- broader voluntary spread prevention compliance due to enhanced education as well as increased regional efforts and environmental stewardship
- increased enforcement of all aquatic invasive species laws and revenues from fines

9. If Vermont boaters were exempt from an AIS decal, what would projected decal revenues look like?

- Tracking the total out-of-state boat traffic on Vermont waters is not a current function of the state and is unknown. Based on SFY2021, VTDMV revenue of only 71 validation stickers, the FOVLAP Board of Directors believes this number is underrepresented and does not reflect the numbers of out-of-state boaters accessing Vermont waters. There is no accurate state data on out-of-state boat traffic numbers to determine true revenue gain. NH also is facing the same unknown amount of out-of-state motorboat traffic as they roll out their 2022 decal program. In addition, VTDMV revenue from out-of-state motorboats only represents the boat owners who *elect* to purchase a validation sticker. It is difficult for an enforcement officer to determine the time a boat spends on Vermont waters and therefore enforce this requirement.
- If the Vermont MBR total for SFY21 was approximately \$1.2M and if out-of-state motorboat traffic is roughly 20% of in-state motorboat usage and the validation sticker fees align with the [instate MBR fee scale](#), then Vermont could see over \$249K revenue from out of state motorboats. If the requirement to purchase validation stickers is enforced adequately throughout the state in the future, that respective revenue could be higher.
- The annual projected revenues from a decal that includes Vermonters is \$500K projected. The projection would be much less if the decal is solely for out-of-state boaters.

Note: Rep. Kari Dolan posed the questions listed above regarding drafting a bill to require motorboats to purchase and display an aquatic invasive species decal to provide funds to support education about and prevention of the spread of aquatic invasive species in Vermont waters. Rep. Dolan introduced an AIS Decal bill, [H.554](#), in January 2022, but the bill did not gain traction in 2022, the second year of the 2021-2022 Vermont Legislative Session. FOVLAP's Legislative Committee provided question responses.