



House of Representatives

General Assembly

File No. 437

February Session, 2026

House Bill No. 5525

House of Representatives, April 7, 2026

The Committee on Environment reported through REP. PARKER of the 101st Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the House, that the bill ought to pass.

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

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) (a) For the purposes of this
2 section, "rapid response" means a systematic effort to eradicate, contain
3 or control a potentially invasive nonnative plant species introduced into
4 an ecosystem while the infestation of such ecosystem remains localized,
5 including actions that address both: (1) Novel introductions into a
6 waterbody, and (2) satellite infestations of previously established
7 populations, including small, localized infestations in areas of a
8 waterbody where such species has not yet become established. "Rapid
9 response" includes the application of species-specific factors, including,
10 but not limited to, reproductive rates of a species, the ability of vectors
11 to transmit such species and the likelihood and mechanisms of spread.

12 (b) Notwithstanding the provisions of section 22a-339i of the general
13 statutes, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection shall
14 expedite any permitting associated with rapid response actions for

15 aquatic invasive species to enable the timely containment of such
16 species and reduce the risk of further spread within and between
17 waterbodies, provided priority expedition shall be given to permits for
18 the containment of hydrilla.

19 (c) Notwithstanding the provisions of section 22-79a of the general
20 statutes, the Office of Aquatic Invasive Species shall identify new
21 introductions of aquatic invasive plant species to the state and
22 coordinate and conduct rapid response efforts to any such new
23 population in any waterbody in the state.

24 (d) Notwithstanding the provisions of subdivision (2) of subsection
25 (h) of section 22a-62 of the general statutes, any rapid response herbicide
26 treatment undertaken pursuant to the provisions of this section shall not
27 require the provision of two individual notices to each owner of
28 waterfront property on a privately owned lake or pond.

29 (e) (1) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsections (a) to (d),
30 inclusive, of this section, rapid response actions for hydrilla shall be
31 considered time-sensitive and any hydrilla populations identified for
32 rapid response pursuant to this section shall be spot treated with an
33 appropriate herbicide on or before the next occurring September
34 fifteenth.

35 (2) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsections (a) to (d), inclusive,
36 of this section, rapid response actions for newly introduced aquatic
37 invasive plant species shall be considered time-sensitive when any such
38 species demonstrate seasonal reproduction, including the formation or
39 release of propagules, larvae, spores or other viable life stages. Any
40 control effort of such species, whether chemical, mechanical or
41 biological, shall be timed in accordance with the best available science
42 to occur prior to or during key reproductive periods to minimize
43 establishment and secondary spread.

44 (f) The Office of Aquatic Invasive Species shall assist rapid response
45 efforts related to newly discovered hydrilla and newly introduced
46 aquatic invasive species identified in state waterbodies by mapping the

47 extent and location of such populations and documenting the presence
48 and locations of relevant threatened and endangered species within a
49 scientifically determined radius, established in consultation with the
50 Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's Natural
51 Diversity Data Base program, while determining the sensitivity of such
52 species to proposed herbicide treatments and other containment or
53 eradication methods.

54 (g) (1) There is established an Interagency Aquatic Invasive Species
55 Task Force that shall include members from the Department of Energy
56 and Environmental Protection, the Office of Aquatic Invasive Species,
57 state institutions of higher education, municipal officials,
58 representatives from private land and waterbody associations,
59 environmental conservation advocacy organizations or any other
60 organization, as deemed necessary and appointed by the Commissioner
61 of Energy and Environmental Protection and the director of the Office
62 of Aquatic Invasive Species.

63 (2) Such task force shall develop a state rapid response protocol for
64 hydrilla. Such protocol shall clearly define the roles, responsibilities,
65 response actions and required timeframes for the Department of Energy
66 and Environmental Protection and the Office of Aquatic Invasive
67 Species. In developing such protocol, the task force shall establish a
68 coordinated framework for interagency response that identifies lead
69 and supporting functions throughout the response process and outlines
70 next steps to contain or eradicate new hydrilla populations. Such steps
71 shall include, but not be limited to, public education and outreach,
72 containment strategies, treatment methods and associated timelines and
73 any additional actions deemed necessary by the Department of Energy
74 and Environmental Protection and the Office of Aquatic Invasive
75 Species. Such protocol may serve as a template for responding to future
76 introductions of new aquatic invasive species. Under any such protocol,
77 (A) the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection shall issue
78 expedited permits for rapid responses, and (B) the Office of Aquatic
79 Invasive Species shall be authorized to coordinate or conduct treatment
80 within the same season once such expedited permitting occurs. The

81 Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and the Office of
82 Aquatic Invasive Species shall monitor progress and track outcomes of
83 such rapid response protocol to a specific population and waterbody.

84 (3) Such task force shall develop a state-wide aquatic invasive species
85 management plan for public reference. The task force shall consult with
86 the Invasive Plants Council, established pursuant to section 22a-381 of
87 the general statutes, in developing such management plan and may
88 engage additional entities, including, but not limited to, the Connecticut
89 Federation of Lakes. Such management plan shall include, but not be
90 limited to, a discussion of the applicability of boat washing stations to
91 the prevention and management of aquatic invasive species.

92 (h) Notwithstanding any provision of the general statutes, the
93 Department of Public Health shall condition a permit to the Department
94 of Energy and Environmental Protection to conduct treatment of an
95 aquatic invasive species in an area not less than two hundred feet from
96 a public drinking watershed.

97 (i) The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection shall
98 install signs at all waterbodies and boat ramps in the state to educate the
99 public about the presence of hydrilla. Such signs shall include a photo
100 of such plant and provide instructions on how to prevent the spread of
101 such plant, including cleaning boats and other water equipment. The
102 department shall coordinate and provide technical assistance to
103 municipalities and private property and waterbody associations or
104 marinas to install such signs in municipal waterbodies and at municipal
105 boat ramps. The department shall expedite any permitting or approval
106 process for any municipality or private association or marina to install
107 any such sign.

108 (j) (1) The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection shall
109 develop a plan to construct boat washing stations at all state boat ramps.
110 Such plan shall provide for the phase-in of the construction of such boat
111 washing stations and provide for the maintenance of such boat washing
112 stations and the hiring and training of aquatic invasive species stewards.

113 (2) The department shall provide technical assistance to
114 municipalities, upon request, for the planning and construction of boat
115 washing stations at municipal boat launches.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	October 1, 2026	New section

ENV *Joint Favorable*

The following Fiscal Impact Statement and Bill Analysis are prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.

OFA Fiscal Note

State Impact:

Agency Affected	Fund-Effect	FY 27 \$	FY 28 \$
Department of Energy and Environmental Protection	GF - Cost	up to 100,000	up to 100,000

Note: GF=General Fund

Municipal Impact:

Municipalities	Effect	FY 27 \$	FY 28 \$
Various Municipalities	Potential Savings	Potential	Potential

Explanation

The bill results in an annual cost to the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) of up to \$100,000 annually. The additional costs are associated with expedited permitting for rapid response actions, herbicide costs, and public outreach and education, including installing signs at waterbodies and boat ramps to educate the public about hydrilla.

The bill also establishes the Interagency Aquatic Invasive Species Task Force which includes members from DEEP and the Office of Aquatic Invasive Species (OAIS). This is not anticipated to result in a cost as DEEP and OAIS have the staff and expertise necessary to complete the requirements contained within the bill.

The bill results in a potential savings to municipalities beginning in FY 27 to the extent technical assistance is provided by DEEP to municipalities for planning and constructing boat washing stations at

municipal boat launches. Any savings is dependent on what resources a municipality would have otherwise been required to use.

The Out Years

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would continue into the future subject to inflation.

OLR Bill Analysis**HB 5525*****AN ACT CONCERNING A RAPID RESPONSE PROGRAM FOR CERTAIN AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES.*****SUMMARY**

This bill outlines certain rapid response actions and associated timeframes to eradicate, contain, or control, while the infestation remains localized, potentially invasive non-native aquatic plants, including hydrilla, introduced into an ecosystem. These actions address both (1) new introductions in a waterbody and (2) satellite infestations (small, localized infestations in an area of a waterbody where the species is not established) of previously established populations. Under the bill, “rapid response” includes the application of species-specific factors, such as a species’ reproductive rate, vectors’ ability to transmit the species, and the likelihood and mechanisms of spread.

The bill also:

1. establishes the Interagency Aquatic Invasive Species Task Force to develop a (a) state rapid response protocol for hydrilla and (b) statewide aquatic invasive species management plan and
2. requires the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to (a) install signs at waterbodies and boat ramps to educate the public about hydrilla and (b) develop a plan to construct boat washing stations at all state boat ramps.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

RAPID RESPONSE ACTIONS AND TIMEFRAMES

The bill requires the Office of Aquatic Invasive Species (OAIS) to identify new introductions of aquatic invasive plant species, including

hydrilla, and coordinate and conduct rapid response actions for any new population in a Connecticut waterbody. In doing so, OAIS 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. OAIS must also determine how sensitive any identified threatened or endangered species is to proposed herbicide treatments and other containment or eradication methods.

Under the bill, any rapid response actions for (1) hydrilla or (2) species that demonstrate seasonal reproduction (including forming or releasing propagules, larvae, spores, or other viable life stages) are considered time sensitive. For hydrilla, once a population is identified for rapid response, the bill requires spot treatment with an appropriate herbicide no later than the following September 15. For species with seasonal reproduction, the bill requires any control actions, including chemical, mechanical, or biological, to occur, based on best available science, before or during key reproductive periods to minimize establishment and secondary spread.

The bill requires (1) DEEP to expedite permitting for rapid response actions and prioritize expediting permits for containing hydrilla and (2) the Department of Public Health to condition a permit to DEEP to conduct aquatic invasive species' treatment in an area at least 200 feet from a public drinking watershed. It also exempts any rapid response herbicide treatment from requiring two individual notices to privately owned lake or pond waterfront property owners.

INTERAGENCY AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES TASK FORCE

Under the bill, the DEEP commissioner and OAIS director must appoint the task force's members. The task force must include (1) members from DEEP, OAIS, and Connecticut higher education institutions; (2) municipal officials; and (3) representatives from private land and waterbody associations, environmental conservation advocacy organizations, and any other organization the commissioner and director determine are necessary.

Hydrilla Rapid Response Protocol

The bill requires the task force to develop a state rapid response protocol for hydrilla. The protocol must define the roles, responsibilities, and response actions and timeframe for DEEP and OAIS. In developing the protocol, the task force 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 must 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, DEEP and 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.

Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan

The bill also requires the task force to develop a publicly accessible statewide aquatic invasive species management plan. To do so, the task force (1) must consult the state's Invasive Plants Council and (2) may engage other entities, including the Connecticut Federation of Lakes. The management plan must address how boat washing stations can help prevent and manage aquatic invasive species.

HYDRILLA EDUCATION SIGNS

The bill requires DEEP to install signs at all waterbodies and boat ramps in the state to educate the public about the presence of hydrilla. The signs must include a photo of the plant and give instructions on how to prevent its spread, including cleaning boats and other water equipment. DEEP must (1) coordinate and give technical assistance to municipalities and private property and waterbody associations or marinas to install signs at municipal waterbodies and boat ramps and (2) expedite any permitting or approval process to install these signs.

BOAT WASHING STATIONS

The bill requires DEEP to develop a plan to construct boat washing stations at all state boat ramps (presumably, those DEEP owns or operates). The plan must include (1) construction phase-in, (2) station maintenance, and (3) hiring and training aquatic invasive species stewards. DEEP must also give technical assistance to any municipality that requests it for planning and constructing boat washing stations at municipal boat launches.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Environment Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 34 Nay 0 (03/18/2026)