
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)