January 26, 2022

Dear SDRA Members and Friends,

I have been working closely with Judy Colaluca in her role as President of “Save the Lakes” (STL) and its statewide committee seeking to achieve a stronger support role by the State of RI to help fight aquatic invasive species. Following are two items reflecting highlights to date of the committee’s work to focus public attention and action to help RI's lakes address problems, especially those pertaining to Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS).

- **Attachment A: Position Paper: RI Lakes - A Threatened Species**
- **Attachment B: Financial Information for AIS Abatement**

Please review the documents presented here and contact me (578-2308) or Judy (486-8414) if you have any questions or can identify additional steps.

More than a thousand Rhode Islanders have signed a petition or completed a survey seeking legislative support for lakes. The survey takes only a few minutes to complete. If you have not already signed the petition or completed the survey, please do so now - ***and also forward it to your mailing lists with your own letter of support.*** We see the surveys rolling in when a personal letter is sent out with the survey. Here is the survey link:

Save the Lakes Endorsement Survey for State Support to Combat Aquatic Invasive Species

Your interest and support are needed and will be greatly appreciated!

SIncerely,
Janice Baker
President, SDRA

Attachment A: RI LAKES - A THREATENED SPECIES!

RI lakes, once pristine sites for native ecosystems and recreation, have been attacked by aquatic invasive species (AIS). If the situation is not remedied, RI lakes will be swallowed by AIS and other pollutants.

"SAVE THE LAKES", and individual lake associations, all-volunteer & non-profit, have been struggling to fight the AIS battle; their dues & fundraising efforts cannot keep pace with the spread of aquatic invasive species. Unchecked, AIS will kill our lakes - for fishing, swimming, boating and community enjoyment.

RI LAKES: FACTS, FINDINGS & FAILINGS

- RI has hundreds of lakes, ponds & reservoirs, covering more that 20,000 acres (230 are 5+ acres; 72 are 50+ acres; & 4 exceed 500 acres). These precious natural resources provide:
  - multiple recreational opportunities for fishing, swimming & boating;
  - important aquatic habitats:
  - a reliable source of drinking water for most RI residents;
  - and bordering properties have enhanced value that translates into increased revenue to cities & towns.

- **RI's Dept. of Environmental Management (DEM) has documented the significant negative impacts of AIS:**

  Ecological Costs:

  Loss of beneficial native species
  Decreased biodiversity
  Changes in fish & wildlife habitat
  Disruption of local food web stability
  Degradation of water quality

  Recreational Losses

  Interference with swimming, paddling, boating & fishing
  Alteration of sport fish habitat & reduced fishing habitat due to stressed communities

  Economic Impacts

  Damage to infrastructure (such as clogging dam gates, canals, & irrigation or other intake pipes)
  Nuisance conditions may reduce property values (affecting tax revenues for cities & towns)
  Fewer recreational opportunities may impact tourism & affect businesses in the community

- **A decade ago, RI's DEM, with federal funding assistance, conducted a major study documenting the prevalence & serious threat posed by AIS.** This report, ("Rhode Island Freshwater Lakes and Ponds: Aquatic Invasive Plants and Water Quality Concerns", Feb. 2012)**,** presented to the Governor & General Assembly, found that:
  - *42% of the 130 bodies of water examined had Variable Leaf Milfoil (VLM);*
  - *59% had one or more types of invasive species;*
  - *29% have State boat ramps - and of that group, 74% had invasive species.*

  The report also called for financial assistance to lakes to help deter the spread of invasive species. **THE STATE DID NOT ACT ON THAT KEY RECOMMENDATION.**

- **Lakes across the state continue to face significant problems** from:
  - the presence & continuing rapid spread of variable-leaf milfoil (VLM) & other aquatic invasive species;
  - blue-green algae blooms; (about a dozen lake closings because of toxic blooms in 2021)
  - contaminated runoff from roads, farms & other properties bordering or near lakes, ponds & reservoirs.

- **State boat ramps have enabled AIS to spread: AIS hitchhike from lake to lake** because not all boaters follow the regulated protocol, & DEM does not seem to have the resources to monitor the relevant laws & regulations.

- **DEM gathers data and provides reports; but there is no mechanism or funding in place to help lakes ADDRESS AIS problems.** DEM staffing appears insufficient to monitor the laws and regulations in place and helping lakes is simply not a priority. (*See attachment which lists DEM's focus pertaining to lakes*.)

- **RI falls significantly behind other New England states in providing help to combat AIS restore lakes.** Many provide financial support, coordinated initiatives and partnerships, and monitoring of their protective rules & regulations to help save their lakes - often via legislation and/or a state stamp fee or tax on boats and/or motor vehicles that is set aside for these purposes.

SOLUTIONS

- **Ensure a "Lakes Voice" at key commissions/tables that will** integrate lake/pond interests with the work of other statewide groups dedicated to the preservation of natural resources, with emphasis on integration with rivers and the state-established watersheds.

- **Establish a funding mechanism to assist lakes in combatting AIS and other harmful occurrences.**
    - Boat fees, both for RI boats and boats using RI waters; *(CT, Maine, VT are examples*.)
    - Motor vehicles tax added, dedicated to DEM for the purposes that would become more precisely defined in the legislation. (*NH, similar to RI with not a large number of people compared to the other New England states, provides a worthy model.*)

- **Require that DEM:**
    - develop and implement a plan for monitoring state boat ramps on a regular basis to help halt the transport of invasive species from lake to lake;
    - Develop rules & procedures by which lake associations or similar groups, along with their potential partners, can apply for and receive funds to help sustain these freshwater bodies (*with some form of matching requirements for applicants to ensure maximum value of the pool of funds established*).

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ATTACHMENT B: FISCAL INFORMATION FROM SEVERAL RI LAKES

RI lakes are battling aquatic invasive species (AIS), milfoil being the predominant one, but there are others as well. This has been documented by our state Department of Environmental Management (DEM) as well as some individual lake studies and assessments to delineate the presence and locations of milfoil - typically so that treatments can occur to impede their growth and takeover. State boat launch ramps provide great access, but have enabled the transport of AIS because these invasive plants are easily transported on boats, motors & trailers. DEM does not have the resources to monitor the laws and regulations designed to tackle this problem.

Following are several examples highlighting the significant and continuing costs to lake site owners, with the help of fundraisers, seeking to preserve these treasured resources that are used by owners and visitors alike for fishing, boating and swimming, as well as for their natural beauty and the wildlife supported within and nearby.

SAND DAM/SMITH & SAYLES RESERVOIR'S BATTLE AGAINST AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES (AIS)

The Sand Dam Reservoir Association (SDRA) has been tackling milfoill for more than a decade. Initially, USDA helped immensely by identifying and treating milfoil over a 3-year period, and, as part of that grant, technical assistance was given to help SDRA develop strategies and a management plan to continue monitoring & treating this aggressive invasive species. Presented here is a brief look at the history of those treatment efforts - **which have now exceeded more than $100,000** and many thousands of volunteer hours to implement the many components necessary to keep Sand Dam Reservoir/ Smith & Sayles Reservoir healthy.

$56,000

- **2009-11**
- **Identification & treatment of more than 50 acres of milfoil**
- **Included assistance to develop a lake management plan**
- **Federally funded**
- **Cost per acre: difficult to determine because lake association unable to locate those records, & development of a lake management plan was also supported by those funds**

$17,000

- **2017**
- **Lake Association,** *using "Go Fund Me" to raise the funds,* purchased **a used *Suction Harvester* (SH) to remove milfoil**
- **SH is viable only for smaller patches of milfoil**
- **Lake Association members donated necessary additional support & safety items**
- **Volunteer teams of 4 - 10 have conducted numerous sessions since that purchase to pull out & remove milfoil to a safe location so as to not re-enter the lake**
- **Approximately 1000 volunteer hours in total have been spent on this initiative**

$10,000

- **2018**
- **Identification & treatment of 46 acres of milfoil with chemicals**
- **Lake Association dues and fundraising supported this effort**

$26,000

- **2021**
- **Identification & treatment of 30 acres of milfoil**
- **Procellacor, a much higher quality of chemical, was used; it has no harmful consequences to fish or humans**
- **Lake Association dues and fundraising supported this effort**

$92,000 expended to date**: $56,000/61% in federal funds** and **$36,000/39% local funds** from dues & fundraisers

TIOGUE LAKE'S BATTLE AGAINST AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES (AIS)

The Tiogue Lake Association has been systematically tackling weed abatement during the past 4 years. Presented here is a summary of the expenditures made - **which have now exceeded more than $23,000 in that short period of time.** These funds represent a combination of grants and fundraising by members of the Tiogue Lake Association.

$6,800 **in 2018**

$6,800 **in 2019**

$4,750 **in 2020**

$5,000 **in 2021**

$23,350 **in total**

HUNDRED ACRE POND'S BATTLE AGAINST AIS - MILFOIL

Hundred Acre Pond's battle against milfoilstarted 30+ years ago, at a cost of about $3500 per treatment; treatments were not done annually, as it was completely a voluntary donation by lot owners. Over that period of time not less than $35,000 would have been spent and likely not more than $52,000.

Starting approximately 15 years ago (about 2007-2016) for 10 years:

- **Hundred Acre Pond treating sequentially, then taking a year off.**
- **Cost: about $5000/yr.**
- **Estimated total cost for 2 years treatment, then one year off: $30,000+**

Starting 2017 to 2022:

- **Annual treatments**
- **Cost approx $6500/yr.**
- **Total for this period: $39,000**

Future Potential Options that have or are being considered:

- **Complete Pond & River Inflow Treatment - estimated cost: $80,000; claimed as a "cure-all"/lifetime treatment; not favored by environmentalists**
- **Alternative proposal is for $64,000 treatment, then continued annual treatments is on the table;; marginal favor for this**
- **Possibly hire a biologist to conduct a pond study; estimated cost: $7,000**

GEORGIAVILLE POND ASSOCIATION'S BATTLE AGAINST BLUE-GREEN ALGAE

$7,000 in 2020-21; donated by the Georgiaville Pond Association to purchase a Water Fountain for aeration

$1,000 in 2021; donated by the Town of Smithfield toward purchase of the Water Fountain

$8,000 in total for the fountain itself

$3,000+ for timer & weights to hold fountain in place, plus electricity for its operation; paid by the Town

$11,000 in total, with $7000(63%) contributed by the lake association and $4,000+(33%) by the Town