

BOAT STEWARD PROGRAMS

Aquatic Invasive Species Education and Outreach

Aquatic invasive species (AIS) are non-native aquatic plants and animals that can cause environmental and economic harm and harm to human health. Many AIS have been found in the lakes, ponds, and rivers of New York. These plants and animals are often transported from waterbody to waterbody on watercraft and equipment. Boat stewards perform a vital function in protecting New York State's waters and raising public awareness about aquatic invaders.

Who are boat stewards?

Boat stewards are volunteers or paid members of the community who provide boaters and other water recreationists with important information about what precautions can be taken to reduce the likelihood of spreading AIS. They help people learn how to inspect, clean, drain, and treat watercraft and equipment. Stewards will also ask where you last launched and can sometimes determine what invasive species are found in the lake or pond you visited through the iMapInvasives website. Stewards have a wealth of knowledge about AIS and are happy to answer your questions.

Why are boat steward programs necessary?

New York has more than 7,000 lakes, ponds, and rivers that could potentially be exposed to dozens of harmful [aquatic invasive species](#) (www.dec.ny.gov/animals/50272.html).

One of the main pathways for transfer of aquatic invasive species between waterbodies is recreational water vehicles (boats, canoes, kayaks, and jet skis). Aquatic invasive plants and animals such as hydrilla, water chestnut, Eurasian watermilfoil, zebra mussels, and Asian clams are easily transported on boats, boat trailers, and recreational gear.

The regulation, [NYCRR Part 576](#), requires water recreationists to take reasonable precautions to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species (www.dec.ny.gov/animals/99141.html). In support of this regulation, New York is expanding boat steward programs across the state, particularly in popular, high-use areas. In-person interactions with boaters, anglers, and other recreational water users raises awareness about aquatic invasive species and practices (cleaning, draining, and treating) that reduce the chance of spreading aquatic invaders.



Boat steward records information from a boater. J. Clayton, DEC

Where are boat steward programs located?

Over the last few years, boat steward programs have expanded from the Finger Lakes and Adirondack Regions to Western New York, the Catskills, the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers, and Long Island. More than 120 locations have active boat stewards. The programs are administered by academic institutions, lake associations, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Cornell Cooperative Extension, NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (Parks), and Regional Partnerships for Invasive Species Management (PRISMs) at both public and private launches.

How do you start a boat steward program?

Setting up and maintaining a boat stewardship program can seem daunting. DEC, NYS Parks, New York Sea Grant, and several other partners have teamed up to provide support for boat steward programs. This team of agencies and organizations are making every effort to standardize the training, messaging, and information that is distributed throughout the state. In the near future, data collection, analysis, and storage will also be standardized and centrally located.

Many resources are available for organizations interested in learning more about what is involved in starting a program and how to improve upon and expand existing programs. In fact, New York State recently awarded Statewide AIS Spread Prevention Grants to more than twenty organizations to support existing boat steward programs and start new ones.



Boat steward inspects kayaks. J. Clayton, DEC

Resources for new and existing boat steward programs

DEC has compiled a variety of useful information for new and existing steward programs on its website at www.dec.ny.gov/animals/107807.html. Topics include:

- Locations of active boat stewards
- Locations of all public boat launches
- Information about funding opportunities
- Training tools
- Education and outreach materials

CONTACT INFORMATION

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