

The Post-Star

Law would target boats that spread invasive plants

By Dayelin Roman droman@poststar.com | Posted: Sunday, December 20, 2009 5:35 pm

Every summer as boaters launch their vessels in area lakes and rivers, residents concerned about the spread of invasive species stand by watching, according to Assemblywoman Teresa Sayward.

"We have a large number of concerned citizens and groups," she said.

But when boaters inadvertently carrying invasive species into a lake ignore advice to wash off their boats, activists have no recourse.

"They can't tell them it's illegal," Sayward, R-Willsboro, said.

The issue has prompted Sayward to propose a bill that would make the transfer of invasive species such as eurasian watermilfoil illegal between bodies of water.

The law would encourage activists to write down the boat's identification number and send it in to the state Department of Environmental Conservation, which would then assess a fine to the boat owner.

"How do we get the message out without a little bit of teeth?" Sayward said.

Last summer, the Fund for Lake George helped the Lake George Park Commission fund the removal of tons of eurasian watermilfoil from the southern basin of the lake. The Fund spent some \$75,000 to employ a team of divers to hand-pick the plant off the bottom.

Milfoil, which cuts off sunlight and nutrients to native plants and makes swimming and boating unpleasant, is spread through boats that carry it from other bodies of water.

But milfoil is only one of a host of problem plants the law seeks to contain.

The Adirondack Park Agency passed a resolution supporting the bill in November, and has encouraged towns within the park to do the same.

"With approximately 138,000 New Yorkers who live and work in the Adirondack Park and 9 million visitors, we believe our rivers, streams, lakes and ponds are vital to our tourism economy and community and environmental health," an e-mail from APA Chairman Curt Stiles to the town of Chester states. "We believe there is an urgent need to control the movement of existing and new aquatic invasive species in the Adirondack Park."

Keith McKeever, a spokesman for the APA, said invasive species diminish recreational opportunities in water and can sometimes turn into a thick mat that won't allow boats through.

At a Chester Town Board meeting on Dec. 8, officials passed a resolution to support the legislation, but wondered whether it was enforceable.

"I know its going to be a difficult thing to enforce," Town Supervisor Fred Monroe said. Councilman Michael Packer nodded his head in agreement.

But Sayward said DEC has the resources to enforce it and send staff to boat launches.

"The people are on the ground already," she said.

And since the law will be attached to penalties and fines for those who break it, the generation of revenue is a possibility, she said.

"People will understand we have a huge problem with invasives," Sayward said.