

State backs away from mandatory boat-washing plan for Lake George

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LAKE GEORGE -- The mandatory boat inspection and washing program proposed by the Lake George Park Commission is in jeopardy after state Department of Environmental Conservation officials questioned how effective it would be.

The Park Commission was scheduled to vote Tuesday on a program aimed at stopping the march of stowaway invasive species into the lake.

But commissioners tabled the proposal after DEC's invasive species expert, Kathy Moser, earlier this month told the Adirondack Park Agency that the boat-washing program wouldn't be worth its \$700,000 annual cost.

DEC scientists estimate visual inspections, like those already conducted on Lake George by summer staff from the Lake George Association, capture between 80 and 85 percent of invasive species clinging to boats, Moser said. Boat wash stations remove 90 percent from the boats, Moser said.

"It is effective, but not as much as you would think," she told APA board members.

Moser's comments verify sources who have said over the last several months that DEC has serious reservations about the proposed "lockdown" of Lake George, under which boaters could be charged \$40 each time their vessel needs to be inspected.

Lake George Park Commission Executive Director Dave Wick and commissioners who support a boat-washing program have for months worked to sway DEC and environmental staff in Gov. Andrew Cuomo's administration.

Any regulation must survive a vetting by Cuomo's office after Park Commission approval. The mandatory inspection proposal, without the backing of the state's environmental regulatory agency, could be dead in the water.

"It's unfortunate that DEC, that should be leading the charge, is being the stumbling block," Park Commissioner Dean Cook said Tuesday. "This young lady obviously hasn't heard the science we've heard."

Boats play a role in the introduction of some invasives, but Moser said no evidence shows that watercraft led to the invasion of the Asian clam in 2010 into Lake George. The Asian clam, and the more than \$1 million spent trying to eradicate it since its discovery in the lake, have driven the mandatory boat inspection proposal.

Boat inspection backers have used the experience of California's Lake Tahoe as their primary example of the dangers of the nutrient-pumping mollusks.

But Lake Tahoe's unique water chemistry is likely feeding the clam population, making it a poor

comparison with Lake George, Moser said.

A “self certification and random inspection” program, under which boaters would pledge their boats are clean, drained and dry, would be a cheaper alternative than the mandatory crackdown, Moser said.

Lake George Park commissioners, though, remain convinced that only the mandatory program can protect the lake.

“I’m sympathetic that DEC has a statewide problem,” said Park Commission Chairman Bruce Young. “But my concern is Lake George.”

Mandatory inspections worry officials in Albany because, if effective, they would further strain the state’s budget, Park Commission Executive Director Dave Wick recently said.

DEC believes the Park Commission has unilaterally pushed the mandatory program without involving the larger state agency, officials said.

Park commissioners counter that DEC officials have been invited to each of more than a dozen meetings held on the proposal.

“They’re fully aware of what we have in mind,” Cook said. “They have elected to not participate in what we’re doing.”

The Park Commission Tuesday rescheduled for December the up or down vote on the mandatory boat-washing proposal.

Representatives from the Park Commission and DEC are scheduled to negotiate further on Thursday, Young said.

“We need cooperation for this to happen,” Young said.