

# NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Office of Internal Audit  
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January 25, 2021

The Honorable Thomas P. DiNapoli  
Comptroller  
Office of the State Comptroller  
110 State Street, 15<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Albany, NY 12236

Dear Honorable DiNapoli:

In accordance with the provisions of Section 170 of the Executive Law, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has taken, or will be taking, the following steps to implement the recommendations contained in the Office of the State Comptroller's audit report 2019-S-26, entitled *Management of Invasive Species*.

## **Recommendations:**

### **1. Develop a process to:**

- **Communicate duties and responsibilities to boat stewards;**
- **Monitor steward performance and compliance against standards outlined in the Handbook; and**
- **Coordinate with other oversight entities to improve efforts across public boat launches statewide, ensuring consistency and compliance with signage and other requirements.**

Boat steward duties/responsibilities and Watercraft Inspection Steward Program (WISP) services are outlined in the *New York State Watercraft Inspection Steward Program Handbook* (Handbook). DEC relies on contractors to administer the boat steward programs. The contractors are required to train boat stewards in accordance with the Handbook; ensure on-the-job performance meets the defined standards; and periodically report on program effectiveness. In addition, there are several boat steward programs for which DEC has no oversight (e.g., NYS OPRHP, municipalities, and private lake associations). However, through frequent coordination with DEC staff, many of these programs operate in accordance with WISP program requirements as outlined in the Handbook.

DEC strives to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species by encouraging private marine operators, lake associations, and others with boat launch facilities to inform visitors of the threat of aquatic invasive species and how they can help stop their spread through the use of signage. To promote the consistent usage of WISP signage across the state, DEC has designed universal signage and provides guidance on sign templates related to the threat and mitigation of aquatic invasive species. Boat launches owned and maintained by DEC are required to display

WISP signage. To ensure compliance with this requirement, DEC has directed contractors to report missing WISP signage at boat launch sites under their administration.

**2. Develop and implement policies, procedures, or guidance on:**

- **Issuing permits and monitoring compliance relating to invasive species;**
- **Circumstances that warrant adding specific invasive species management mitigation provisions to permits;**
- **Identifying non-native species and conditions that should trigger assessments for non-native species; and**
- **Periodic complete testing of trap samples for potentially invasive species.**

DEC has initiated changes to the permit issuance process that include the development of a library of standardized special conditions available within DEC's Department Application Review Tracking system, which will allow for the inclusion of permit conditions addressing invasive species management. In addition, guidance and training will be made available to DEC staff engaged in permit review and issuance that explains the need, application, and formulation of permits to include conditions addressing invasive species management. When a permit application review establishes a need for invasive species management, special conditions will be applied to the permit. Furthermore, DEC will continue to use the NYS Invasive Species Council's guidance on performing invasive species assessments and the listing process, and program staff have begun the process of drafting a formal policy regarding the selection of non-native species for assessment. Finally, the Forest Health Disease Laboratory is working to increase DEC's taxonomic capacity to aid in the identification of all specimens collected in subsets of trap samples, and DEC is developing a proposal to contract taxonomic services and obtain seasonal support staff for pre-screening trap samples and training volunteers to assist in pre-screening.

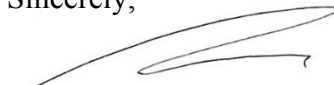
**3. Communicate the existence of and potential uses of iMap to regional staff.**

The iMapInvasives database has and continues to be available to all DEC staff through DEC's internal GIS data selector. Following the release of the audit in 2020, webinars were provided to DEC staff that described the availability and uses of iMapInvasives. In 2021, further events are being planned that will raise awareness and training to DEC staff through multiple Regional meetings.

**4. As soon as practicable, finish all incomplete assessments.**

DEC staff have been working with a qualified contractor and the Department of Agriculture and Markets to complete the assessments.

Sincerely,



Andrew B. Fischler  
Director, Office of Internal Audit