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New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and New York State Canal Corporation Announce Update to Aquatic Invasive Species Rapid Response Plan to Protect Lake Champlain Basin

State Agencies Collaborate to Mitigate Spread of Round Goby

Lock Double Draining on Lower Champlain Canal to Continue

On-Demand Lockings Resume July 3

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and New York State Canal Corporation today announced revisions to the Rapid Response Plan (RRP) that was collaboratively implemented by the State agencies in 2022 to mitigate the spread of round goby, an aquatic invasive species, to the Lake Champlain Basin. The updates are based on a continuous review of round goby monitoring data, an evaluation of the Canal Corporation's operational procedures, and refinement of the use of environmental DNA (eDNA), residual genetic material found in air, water or soil, as a detection tool.

"Protecting our waterways from the threat of invasive species is critical," **said DEC Commissioner Amanda Lefton**. "The Rapid Response Plan will continue to be updated based on the latest scientific best practice and is just one way that New York State seeks to mitigate the spread of round goby. All New York residents and visitors have an important role to play in our efforts to protect state waters from invasive species including "Clean, Drain, Dry" practices for boaters and knowledge of laws related to the use of live bait for anglers."

After first being discovered in the Hudson River near Troy in 2021, to date, round goby has not been captured north of Champlain Canal Lock 1 in Waterford, although there were two positive eDNA detections north of Champlain Canal Lock 2 in Halfmoon in 2024.

More recent eDNA detections of round goby north of Lake Champlain in Canada, have led DEC and the Canal Corporation to add preventative procedures to the RRP to mitigate their potential spread south to the Champlain Canal at Whitehall and the Upper Hudson River at Fort Edward. The updated RRP can be found **here.**

New York State Canal Corporation Director Ben Walsh said, “As stewards of the New York State Canal system, we are responsible for maintaining navigation for recreational and commercial vessel traffic. We also play a vital role in protecting the environment and the health of the watersheds to which the Canal System is connected. These responsibilities are not mutually exclusive: We must find ways to do both. We are thankful for the collaboration of the DEC and other partners as we seek to fulfill our mission and ensure that the Canal waterways are enjoyed by all this season and beyond.”

SUMMARY OF RRP UPDATES

Double Draining Procedures Remain in Place

Since the RRP was first implemented, the Canal Corporation has been proactively double draining its locks along the lower Champlain Canal. The double draining creates a forceful current of water that deters round goby, a slow swimmer, from entering the locks. During double draining each lock is maintained in full condition and emptied twice during locking operations. For northbound vessel traffic, the locks will drain twice before boats enter the lock chamber. For southbound traveling vessels, the lock will empty and refill once before any boats are admitted into the lock for southbound passage. The second draining will occur with the vessels in the lock.

On-Demand Lockings Resume

With the revisions to the RRP, on demand lockings resume along the lower Champlain Canal between Waterford and Stillwater. Since 2024, passage through Locks C-1 through C-4 had been limited to three times daily to reduce the chance of round goby spreading through the locks. After subsequent evaluations, and the recognition of the negative impact it can have on boaters and local marinas, it was determined this activity could be curtailed in favor of other operational adjustments, provided round goby is not detected above Lock C-4.

DEC and the Canal Corporation will continue to monitor the effectiveness of this change in deterring round goby and make any necessary adjustments to ensure continued protection of the Lake Champlain Basin.

Round Goby Detected to the North

As a result of detections of round goby along the Richelieu River in Canada, the northern distributary of Lake Champlain, the RRP has also been revised to include operational responses in the event of an invasion front from the north. In September 2025, the Quebec Ministry of Forests, Wildlife, and Parks caught two live round gobies between Saint-Marc-sur-Richelieu and Chambly and received three positive eDNA detections - two in the Chambly Basin and one at the New York border of Lake Champlain. If round goby is detected south of Burlington, Vermont on Lake Champlain, double draining procedures will be implemented at the northern end of the Champlain Canal to mitigate further spread through the canal and connected waterways to the south.

Continuous Monitoring and Education

The Canal Corporation, DEC and their partners, including the Lake Champlain Basin Program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services and USGS, will continue to monitor the movement of the round goby and may reinstate or expand mitigation measures, as outlined in the RRP. In addition to monitoring, these entities are working together to educate the public about how they can help slow the spread.

The round goby is a significant invasive threat to New York State waters, particularly Lake Champlain. DEC lists round goby as a prohibited invasive species in State regulations. Native to Europe and Asia, this fish was introduced in the Great Lakes in 1990 and spread throughout the lakes' system. Round gobies reproduce quickly, outcompete native fish species for food and habitat, eat the young and eggs of other fish, and can transport botulism through the food chain to waterfowl.

DEC and the Canal Corporation appreciate the patience of mariners and local stakeholders, and encourage everyone to help mitigate the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS) in New York State. Visit DEC's website for more information on how to Clean, Drain, Dry boats, fishing gear, and other equipment. A step by step guide for ridding boats and equipment of AIS with video can also be found on DEC's YouTube channel.

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