



SECTION #1

What is Watercraft Inspection?





Lake George

Recreational boating is identified as a key pathway in the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS) across the Great Lakes Basin including inland waterbodies (Rothlisberger *et al.*, 2010). Indeed, waters everywhere are at risk of AIS influx via watercraft.

Organisms, such as the spiny water flea, Eurasian water-milfoil, and zebra and quagga mussels, can be transported on anything that comes in contact with the water;

including boats, trailers, and other recreational equipment. Early life stages of many plant and animal species, as well as pathogens and bacteria, can be transported in spaces that hold water such as bilge water, livewells, and bait buckets.

Steward-demonstrated watercraft inspection is an effective way:

- to inform boaters about AIS issues and teach them how to intercept the potential introduction and establishment of AIS.
- to help reduce the spread of AIS between waters and
- empowers boaters to protect the natural resources they love.

Boaters can help prevent the spread of AIS from one body of water to another by checking boats, trailers, and equipment for aquatic hitchhikers and draining their boats and all other areas that can hold water before entering or leaving a waterbody.

Although more prevalent on motorized and/or trailered boats, AIS can be transported on or in any type of boat. Therefore, all boats should be inspected whenever possible. Specific examples include but are not limited to fishing boats, house boats, cabin cruisers, ski boats, sail boats, row boats, personal watercraft, canoes, kayaks, paddleboards, and inflatables.



Left, a Watercraft Inspection Steward points out areas on the boat trailer that can easily trap aquatic debris; at right: the Steward shows boaters aquatic debris removed from their vessel.



What is Watercraft Inspection?

Watercraft inspection consists of visually inspecting all areas of boating and recreational equipment (i.e., boat, trailer, motor, livewell, anchor, swim fins, scuba gear, etc.) that come in contact with or hold water; removing all visible plants, animals, and mud; and draining water from all compartments and containers. These practices reduce the risk of movement of all organisms from one body of water to another.

The purpose of watercraft inspection is to:

- Reduce the impact of AIS on native aquatic organisms and ecosystems
- Limit or prevent the spread of AIS by containing infestations to current locations, and
- Increase boater awareness about ways they can help prevent the spread of AIS.

A watercraft inspection program is an outreach tool utilizing paid and/or volunteer stewards to engage and teach boaters how to inspect boats, trailers, and recreational gear for unwanted aquatic hitchhikers, and to properly remove and dispose of those hitchhikers.

While voluntary watercraft inspection is common at some launches, regulations overseeing the removal and proper disposal of hitchhiking debris and organisms is increasing across New York State.



STOP AQUATIC HITCHHIKERS!

Prevent the transport of nuisance species.
Clean all recreational equipment.

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Existing watercraft inspection programs in New York State have adopted the national [Stop Aquatic Hitchhiker](#) (SAH) Campaign and the **Clean~Drain~Dry** messaging (Section 6:7).

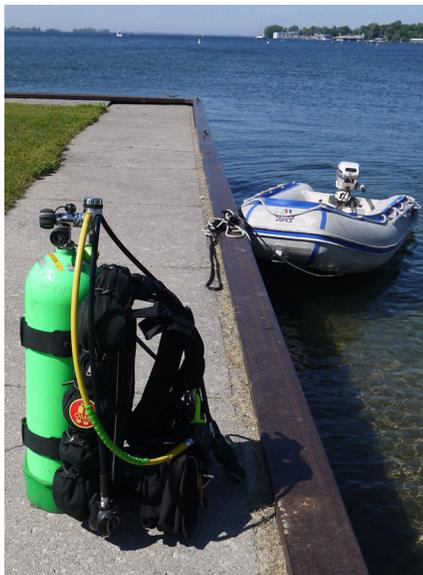
To accomplish the above objectives, watercraft inspection programs:

- Teach boaters how to look for aquatic hitchhikers through the demonstration of watercraft inspection
- Inform boaters about boating-related and other pertinent laws, AIS identification, common AIS spread vectors, and AIS prevention methods
- Develop and distribute watercraft inspection and AIS educational materials
- Collect data on boater usage patterns and the presence of aquatic organisms
- Respond to the boaters' AIS-related questions, and
- Encourage boaters to continue or adopt behaviors that support **Clean~Drain~Dry** practices with all boats, trailers, and other water recreation equipment.



The Value of Watercraft Inspection Programs

Watercraft inspection and associated steward programs are critical components in protecting aquatic ecosystems and water quality by preventing and limiting the spread of AIS among waterbodies in New York State and neighboring states and provinces. By demonstrating proper watercraft inspection and sharing educational messaging during interactions with boaters, stewards lead by example to increase boaters' awareness about ways they can help prevent the spread of AIS and protect New York's recreational waters. Well-conducted demonstrations show boaters that inspections can be quick and simple, and effective in managing AIS.



The term watercraft inspection immediately brings to mind motorized boats, however, the inspection process also focuses on non-motorized vessels, including canoes, kayaks, and paddleboards; and on recreational equipment, such as scuba diving gear, which can also transport AIS.





Engaging the boating public in watercraft inspections helps reduce the threat and impact of AIS on native aquatic organisms and ecosystems by limiting infestations to waters where the AIS are already established, thus helping to keep AIS from becoming established in more pristine waters.



Preventing the spread of AIS reduces the growing costs associated with AIS control in New York State, and the negative impacts AIS have on native organisms, aquatic ecosystems, and local economies.



Watercraft inspection steward programs help to maintain New York waters as popular recreational and vacation destinations.