

Grants to fund boat washing stations

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The Otsego County Conservation Association will receive more than \$129,000 in grant funds to help combat aquatic invasive species in Canadarago and Otsego lakes.

The pair of grants are part of a \$2 million package of funds from the Environmental Protection Fund awarded to municipalities, not-for-profits and higher educational programs across the state.

The grants — \$89,636 for Otsego Lake and \$40,347 for Canadarago Lake — will go toward creating decontamination stations where boats can be thoroughly washed between bodies of water.

“New York state is home to unparalleled natural beauty and we must do everything we can to protect it from invasive aquatic predators,” Gov. Andrew Cuomo said in Tuesday’s media release. “This money will help safeguard lakes and rivers in every corner of this state, protect local ecosystems, and ensure that visitors can experience New York’s natural beauty and wonders for years to come.”

In the fall, the Otsego Lake Association reported that it had received approval from the village to install a permanent boat wash station in Lakefront Park in Cooperstown. OLA and OCCA each pledged funds toward the effort, but came up short of the estimated \$23,000 needed to build the system.

Algae blooms in recent years have prompted concerns, and the closure of Baker's Beach, at Canadarago Lake, with officials warning of the importance of boat washing to combat this and other ills.

With more than 7,600 freshwater lakes, ponds and reservoirs and 70,000 miles of rivers, brooks and streams, New York state is particularly vulnerable to the introduction of invasive species, the release noted. Once established, aquatic invasive species, such as spiny waterflea and Eurasian water milfoil, can rapidly spread through connecting waterbodies or by “hitchhiking” on the vessels of recreational boaters and anglers.

“Aquatic invasive species are a significant threat to the environment and economy of New York state, and these EPF grants will go far in reducing their spread,” DEC Acting Commissioner Basil Seggos said in the release. “Fostering partnerships and collaboration with local governments and other partners are essential to combat this urgent threat, and I look forward to watching these successful projects take off.”

The 24 projects awarded, which range from \$36,000 to \$100,000, represent the first grants of the New York Aquatic Invasive Species Spread Prevention Grant Program.

The program will complement existing aquatic invasive species spread-prevention initiatives underway in New York state, including the Adirondack Aquatic Invasive Species Spread Prevention Pilot Program (launched in 2015), which was responsible for the installation of 12 boat decontamination stations and the placement of boat stewards at 14 new locations within the Adirondack Park.