

# News Release



**For Release:** May 3, 2010

**Regarding:** Spiny Water Flea Spread Prevention Study Results

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## **Spiny Water Flea Report Emphasizes Need for Education and Monitoring**

*Grand Isle, VT* – A study conducted in the past six months helped scientists and lake managers learn new information about the possible transport of the spiny water flea to Lake Champlain. The spiny water flea, *Bythotrephes longimanus*, is an invasive invertebrate from Eurasia with the potential for ecological disruption in lake systems. It is currently found closest to the Lake Champlain basin in the Great Sacandaga Lake in New York. Currently Lake Champlain has 49 known nonnative species, many of which are invasive. Fortunately, the spiny water flea has not yet been found in Lake Champlain.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Lake Champlain Fish and Wildlife Resources Office contracted with HDR to complete the report titled [Feasibility Study of Control Methods for Prevention of Spiny Water Flea Spread to Lake Champlain](#). The study examined the potential for spreading the spiny water flea via connected waterways and also considered possible control methods. Funding for the Lake Champlain feasibility project was obtained by Senator Patrick Leahy in the 2009 Federal budget through the Great Lakes Fishery Commission.

“This study shows just how difficult and expensive it can be to stop the spread of invasive species,” said Senator Leahy. “But the cost of prevention is likely to be a bargain compared to the massive damage invasive species can do once they gain a toe-hold and I will continue to work hard to support these efforts.”

According to Dave Tilton of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Lake Champlain Office, "The appearance of this species in Great Sacandaga Lake, which has a hydrological connection to Lake Champlain, is unfortunate for Great Sacandaga Lake and worrisome for Lake Champlain. One bit of good news is that we determined there is a fairly low probability of passive in-water migration from Great Sacandaga to Lake Champlain. However, inadvertent overland transport by boaters is more likely. The report identifies a strategy including education, monitoring, research and rapid response, and prioritized several potential engineering solutions to prevent in-water migration if monitoring identifies the need. Engineering solutions would be very costly."

### **Possible Pathway to Champlain via the Canals**

New York's Great Sacandaga Lake is located in Fulton and Saratoga Counties, south of the Champlain basin. The Great Sacandaga Lake is a 27,000 acre impoundment on the Sacandaga River in the Hudson River watershed. A small portion of the Hudson River water is diverted

during the canal navigation season through the Glens Falls Feeder Canal, contributing to the water level of the Champlain Canal just north of Lock 8 in Ft. Edward, NY, creating a direct pathway for spiny water flea dispersal to Lake Champlain.

New York State Canal Corporation is also aware that invasive species may be transported via the Champlain Canal. The Canal Corporation has been working in partnership with LCBP, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Vermont and New York state agencies to investigate spread prevention options in more detail. Recently the Canal Corporation requested that the US Army Corps of Engineers initiate a Champlain Canal feasibility study to determine how to best prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species.

Canal Corporation Director Carmella R. Mantello states, "The Canal Corporation believes that the Corps of Engineers' feasibility study is an important next step in managing aquatic invasive species threats to Lake Champlain, including spiny water flea. As a member of the New York State Invasive Species Council, the Canal Corporation is committed to working with our partners to minimize the threat and spread of invasive species throughout the 524-mile New York State Canal System."

In summary, the Feasibility Study of Control Methods for Prevention of Spiny Water Flea Spread to Lake Champlain indicates that *based on the biology of the Spiny Water Flea, there is a low probability it will spread from Great Sacandaga Lake to Lake Champlain through the Champlain Canal. Although spiny water flea has been detected in riverine environments, their preferred habitat is a deep lake environment. If detected in the Sacandaga or Hudson rivers, it is not likely that the spiny water flea would persist long enough to travel an estimated 50 miles from Great Sacandaga Lake to Lake Champlain. There is higher likelihood that the SWF will be spread to Lake Champlain via human activities.*

### **Importance of Sharing Invasive Information via Lake Stewards at Launches**

The Great Sacandaga Lake Advisory Council (GSLAC) utilized lake stewards from the Paul Smith's College Watershed Stewardship Program during the summer of 2009 at the four New York State DEC boat accesses areas along the lake. During voluntary inspections, stewards discussed the importance of spread prevention of the spiny water flea and other species to other regional waterways.

The Great Sacandaga Lake Association which partnered with the GSLAC in the Lake Steward Program was pleased that the lake stewards' professionalism and overall enthusiasm resulted in a higher level of boater responsibility in these efforts. The Lake Association believes that the Steward Program is a valuable tool in preserving the water resources of the Great Sacandaga.

Similarly, the Lake Champlain Basin Program stationed stewards at high use access points on Lake Champlain the past three summers. In 2009, 6,729 voluntary inspections were completed. Of the 572 organisms collected during voluntary inspections, 326 were identified as aquatic invasive species. About 4.8% of the total inspections resulted in removal of an aquatic invasive species from a boat or trailer.

“Our stewards also staffed information booths at fishing derbies and other events throughout the region,” said Meg Modley, Invasive Species Coordinator for the Lake Champlain Basin Program. “We worked with staff from the Lake George Association, the Paul Smith’s Adirondack Watershed Institute and the VT DEC steward programs to ensure a coordinated effort. In 2010, we will have eight stewards stationed at high-use launches from Ticonderoga to St. Albans to greet users and conduct voluntary inspections.”

### **Monitoring for the Spread of the Spiny Water Flea**

In 2009, the Lake Champlain Basin Program Long Term Monitoring Program sampled water in both Champlain Canal and the Glens Falls Feeder Canal five times last summer. The good news is that no indication of spiny water flea was found in the samples collected to date. Monitoring in the both locations will continue this summer through assistance with the New York State Dept of Environmental Conservation, a partner in the Long Term Monitoring Program.

### **For further information:**

Preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species is a high priority as described in the Lake Champlain Basin Program’s long-term management plan, *Opportunities for Action*. The full Spiny Water Flea Feasibility Study report is posted on the LCBP website <http://lcbp.org/ansthreats.htm>. For further information, contact Dave Tilton, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Essex Junction, Vermont at (802) 872-0629.