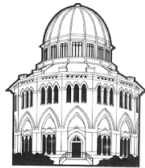


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OUR THIRD CENTURY



John I. Garver
Geology Department
F.W. Olin Center
Union College
Schenectady NY, 12308-2311

Office: (518) 388-6517
Main office: (518) 388-6770
FAX: (518) 388-6417
E-Mail: garverj@union.edu
<http://www.union.edu>

22 March 2022

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
NYS Capitol Building
Albany NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul,

The ***Reimagine the Canals*** effort left unresolved the issue of stemming the flow of invasive species that are using the Erie Canal Corridor (ECC) as a superhighway to access our iconic waterways. Since the *Reimagine* Task Force submitted its report in December 2019, it has become clear that we need to install barriers, and that we have the technology to achieve watershed separation without adversely affecting boat traffic.

The *Reimagine* Task Force, which I was on, evaluated options for mitigating aquatic Invasive Species. The Task force commissioned a study of options for invasive species barriers along the ECC, and the study focused on barriers along the ECC at three sites: Tonawanda, Oswego, and Rome. The final report noted that *“further study of strategies to counter invasives is warranted to protect and enhance New York’s waterways and the businesses that depend on them.”* It is time that we finally address this issue.

Aquatic invasive species (AIS) are using the ECC as a dispersal corridor and damaging our sensitive freshwater ecosystems. NYS DEC’s discovery of the invasive Round Goby in the Hudson below the Mohawk confluence in July 2021 highlights our failure to address AIS in the ECC. We need to contain further spread of this egg-gobbling fish in the upper Hudson and Champlain Canal, but note that an effective barrier on the ECC in Rome would have prevented this invader from accessing the Hudson-Mohawk in the first place. Some of the finest scientists in NYS carefully documented the progress of this invasive fish as it left the Great Lakes watershed and entered the Mohawk in 2019 – well before this invader made it to the Hudson. The Round Goby is the proverbial canary in the coal mine and the message is clear: we have failed to address invasive species in the ECC and our aquatic ecosystems will suffer the consequences. We need corrective action in the form of modern invasive barriers that do not impede boat traffic in the Canal systems.

While the present situation is bad, a concern shared by many colleagues is that the future could be worse. We may face significant collapse of our aquatic ecosystems if invasive Asian Carp gain unrestricted access to the Erie Canal: these fish have already severely damaged recreation and commerce after invading the headwaters of the Mississippi. These fish pose an existential threat to our inland waterways and the time to act is now, before it’s too late.

I urge you to take two important and substantial actions. First, proceed with a barrier on the Champlain Canal to isolate the threat to Lake Champlain from the Hudson. Second, move forward with the well-studied barrier in Rome on the ECC to separate the Great Lakes and the Hudson-Mohawk Watersheds. Once we isolate these distinct watersheds we can take deliberate actions to better understand ecosystem health and restoration. We can put well-engineered invasive barriers in place that keep boat traffic moving across the canal corridors. As they do today, boaters will need to continue to do their part to protect our waterways and the economic benefits they provide.

Sincerely,


John I Garver, PhD
Union College