Connecticut's Aquatic Invasive Species Stamp: Changes in 2025

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Aquatic invasive species, otherwise known as "AIS," are non-native plants and animals introduced to water environments which can wreak havoc on both the ecosystem and the economy. Unlike native species, these invaders often lack natural predators in new environments, enabling rapid, unchecked growth and spread.

Environmental Impact. The disruption caused by AIS starts with effects upon native species; invasive species can outcompete native species for resources, leading to reduced biodiversity. Some invaders, like zebra mussels, filter vast amounts of plankton from water bodies, starving native fish and disrupting food chains. Others, like the invasive plant hydrilla, grow into large dense patches and significantly alter habitat and reduce oxygen levels.

Economic Impact. The toll on the economy can be staggering. From clogged waterways that prevent boating access to costly mitigation efforts, industries like fishing, tourism, and recreation all suffer. The U.S. spends billions annually on controlling invasive species and repairing environmental damage.

Solutions and Management. Addressing the problem requires a multifaceted approach. Preventative measures include stringent controls on ballast water discharge from ships and regulations on the trade of aquatic organisms. Boaters can accidentally facilitate the spread of AIS and therefore must closely inspect their vessel, trailer and gear before leaving a boat launch to ensure that they do not unknowingly transport aquatic hitchhikers. Boaters should follow the "clean, drain, dry" method to ensure they do not contribute to the spread of AIS. Eradication efforts can involve mechanical removal, chemical treatments, or biological controls, though these methods can be expensive and can sometimes have unintended consequences. Public awareness and community involvement are crucial in reporting and managing invasive species sightings.

AIS Stamp in Connecticut. The Lakes, Ponds, and Rivers Preservation account was established in 2019 through Public Act 19-190 to provide a source of grant funds to non-profit groups and municipalities to battle AIS. Since 2020, the funding for this account had come from AIS Stamp fees paid at the time of boat registrations. On October 1, 2024, PA 23-154 became effective which eliminated the fee from DMV boat registrations but instead requires boaters operating on Connecticut's inland waters to purchase the AIS Stamp through DEEP's Sportsmen Licensing System. Specifically, the AIS Stamp requirement applies to any power boats or personal watercraft required to display a registration decal, whether from this state or another. The law provides two options to boaters for purchasing the AIS Stamp.

Option 1 - Individual AIS Stamp ($7.00 per person). The Individual AIS Stamp is assigned only to the individual purchasing the stamp. Proof-of-purchase is displayed on the individual's Sportsmen Conservation License as a privilege like a fishing or hunting license. No decal will be provided.

Option 2 - Vessel AIS Decal ($25.00 per boat). The Vessel AIS Decal covers any operators of a particular vessel and also serves as an Individual AIS Stamp for the individual purchasing the decal. A Vessel AIS Decal will be mailed to the customer which must be affixed to the registered vessel. This will serve as proof-of-purchase. The AIS Decal purchase will also be displayed on the individual's Sportsmen Conservation License as a privilege like a fishing or hunting license. The cost includes a $5.00 processing fee.

Both the Individual AIS Stamp and the Vessel AIS Decal are valid for the calendar year in which is purchased.

The battle against aquatic invasive species is ongoing, demanding constant vigilance and adaptive strategies to safeguard our water environments and the benefits they provide. We encourage all boaters, fishermen and hunters to help battle the spread of aquatic invasive species by purchasing their AIS Stamp. And remember, it's the law.

Visit DEEP's website at https://portal.ct.gov/deep/boating/faqs/faq-ais-stamp to learn more or purchase your AIS stamp.