



**Rhode Island**

**Department of Environmental Management**

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## News Release

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### **DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT TO HOLD TRAINING FOR GREAT BOATER PROGRAM VOLUNTEERS ON JULY 23**

PROVIDENCE – On **Thursday, July 23** at **Bryant University**, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., the Department of Environmental Management (DEM), in collaboration with Save the Lakes, will host a training session for volunteers for the ***GREAT (Greeting Recreationalists to Empower and Train) Boater Program***. DEM and its partners will offer instruction to volunteers who wish to educate boaters at local boat ramps about invasive species and encourage boaters to be vigilant about checking their vessels and removing any plant materials. DEM and Save the Lakes are looking for new volunteers, and any member of the public who wishes to be a volunteer for the GREAT Boater Program must attend to learn more information and sign up.

The GREAT Boater program was designed to help prevent the further spread of aquatic invasive species in Rhode Island. DEM monitoring studies suggest that 60% of freshwater lakes in Rhode Island have at least one invasive plant. Invasive species are plants or animals introduced into an area where they grow out of control, out-competing native species because they often lack natural predators. They often interfere with recreational activities such as swimming, boating and fishing, threaten the biodiversity of fish and wildlife habitat and can cause economic hardship given the high cost of management. The most common invasive plants in Rhode Island are able to reproduce and spread through fragmentation which results in boats being a potential means by which any such plants may be transported into a waterbody. The objective of the GREAT Boater Program is to engage volunteers to raise awareness and educate boaters at public boat access ramps on actions they can take to prevent the spread of invasives from lake to lake. More information on the program is available online:

<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/benviron/water/quality/surfwq/aisresp.htm#GREAT>

In 2014, volunteers from the GREAT Boater Program, noted plant material on boats or trailers at select public boat ramps on at least 25 occasions. Data collected through the program also showed that boats entering a lake can travel from both in and out of state. For example, at one boat ramp staffed with volunteers in Burrillville, 117 boats utilizing the ramp traveled from at least 30 different locations in New England and New York. This data underscores the extensive amount of traffic public lakes can receive and with it, the necessity for all boat owners to take care to check their boat for plants. Removal of any plant material from a boat or trailer is critical to prevent the further spread of these invasive plants to other lakes in Rhode Island. GREAT Boater volunteers play a vital role in educating boaters and empowering them to do their own boat checks for plants every time they leave or launch into a new lake or pond.

The training event will include an overview of invasive species in Rhode Island, instructions for engaging boaters and demonstrating a boat check, explanation of how to properly fill out volunteer log sheets, and discussion of volunteer duties and expectations.

The training is free. To register or learn more information, please contact Heather Nicholson at 222-4700 x 7728 or email [heather.nicholson@dem.ri.gov](mailto:heather.nicholson@dem.ri.gov)

Project partners include Save the Lakes, DEM's Office of Water Resources; with funding support from the DEM's Division of Fish & Wildlife Aquatic Resource Education Program.

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