



A Call for a Balanced Approach to Managing the New York State Canal System

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A recent campaign to “[Close one lock to save Lake Champlain from invasive fish](#)” calls attention to environmental threats posed by the Round goby should it reach Lake Champlain via the Hudson River and Champlain Canal. However, the simple proposal put forth is wholly inadequate for managing a complex international waterway with multiple users and stakeholders.

Closing “just one lock” on the Champlain Canal or “one guard gate” on the Erie Canal sounds simple enough. But such a closure would severely impede and most likely eliminate all recreational and commercial boat traffic between Canada and the U.S. via New York waterways. These measures threaten to erase decades of waterfront investments made by communities all along New York’s canals and the Hudson River. And they threaten to significantly alter a legendary waterway about to celebrate its bicentennial.

Worse, closing a lock on the Champlain Canal, or a guard gate on the Erie Canal, would not eliminate the possibility of the Round goby reaching Lake Champlain. People spread the Round goby through the improper use and disposal of live bait. It spreads when watercraft, including boats, swim rafts, and other equipment are moved from one body of water to another, often by trailer. It spreads by ballast water discharged by transatlantic ships using the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway System, which connects to Lake Champlain via the Richelieu River and Chambly Canal at the northern end of the lake.

The NYS Canal System adds to the vitality and economies of cities, towns, and villages along its length, as well as communities along the Hudson and St. Lawrence rivers, Lake Champlain, Lake Ontario, and Lake Erie. Boaters using the Canal System to travel throughout eastern North America also contribute to communities along the Atlantic Seaboard from Maine to Florida to the Great Lakes. Businesses that languished through the pandemic, including restaurants and marinas, depend on through-boaters to survive.



Closing “just one lock” and one guard gate would eliminate all long distance through-traffic and could deal a fatal blow to those local proprietors.

The NYS Canal System continues to play a critical role in New York’s transportation network. While commercial traffic is no longer the canals’ chief use, bulk cargoes (e.g., crushed stone) and high value specialty cargoes (e.g., Genesee Brewery tanks, General Electric steam turbine rotors, U.S. Navy sonar components) continue to be shipped via canal. In some cases, the canal provides the only viable method of transporting these shipments. Do we really want to give up a low carbon means to move these components and other bulk cargoes via vessels that may be too large or costly to move by land?

The State of New York, local communities and businesses, the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, and many others have been reimagining New York’s canals for more than 20 years – and making great strides. An effort to close the NYS Canal System without having a more robust public dialogue is much too extreme.

We share valid concerns regarding the spread of invasive species. But we need smarter solutions that carefully consider the environmental, economic, and community impacts of both threats and proposed mitigation measures.

We believe a win-win scenario where the NYS Canal System can remain an integral economic component of the Empire State’s future while also mitigating the spread of invasive species is possible. Let’s employ and test invasive species mitigation techniques, such as bubble screens and bio-acoustic fencing, before taking more dramatic measures such as lock closure.

Commercial and recreational navigation and invasive species mitigation can co-exist if all the stakeholders are willing to engage in open dialogue and seek long-term solutions.

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