



POSITION STATEMENT

On Disposal of Historic Canal Vessels by NYS Canal Corporation / New York Power Authority

The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor (ECNHC) is working to improve the quality of life in more than 230 canal communities and helping to guide the re-emergence of the Erie Canalway in the 21st century.

Our goals of particular relevance to historic New York State Canal Corp. vessels include:

- To protect and celebrate the canal's historic and distinctive sense of place;
- To facilitate current and future generations supporting preservation of canal heritage; and
- To make the Corridor a "must-do" travel experience.

ECNHC has acted as a reliable and good-faith partner with NYS Canal Corp. (and its parent organizations) for more than a decade. We would like to continue to add value to the NYS Canal System and its stewardship entities for many years to come. It is in this spirit that we offer the following comments and recommendations relative to our present understanding of NYS Canal Corp. (and New York Power Authority) plans to dispose of historic floating plant vessels.

MANAGEMENT/ OPERATIONS

We acknowledge the tremendous efforts of the Canal Corp., and its related entities, in managing and maintaining the NYS Canal System. ECNHC also acknowledges the challenges of operating and maintaining such an historic canal system and its vessels. Indeed, there appear to be vessels that may be obsolete and, in no way, are we encouraging unsafe vessels to continue in operation. We understand that full and complete disposition of certain vessels may indeed be reasonable and rational.

However, we believe a vibrant and healthy floating plant is critical to using and showcasing this historic transportation system. Some vessels are iconic, extremely unique and irreplaceable. They are symbols of New York State pride. In addition, they are valuable assets that encourage visitation and heritage tourism leading to community economic development benefits.

VESSELS

ECNHC is not aware of the overall plan for the Canal Corp. floating plant and therefore finds it very challenging to comment without knowing the full fleet vision. However, the potential for irreversible disposition of iconic vessels causes us to offer these comments and offer our assistance.

We respectfully request that NYSCC/NYPA make available a list of all vessels proposed for disposition or removal from service, their current condition, National Register status, and current or pending plans for use or disposition.

Please note that it may be important to maintain at least sample representation of various types of boats (buoy, tenders, etc.). Again, a public list of vessels and their current condition would be helpful to assess.

Tug *Urger*

The Tug *Urger*, listed on the National Register, is in a class by itself. We support its continued active use plying the canal waterways. The *Urger* has been a floating ambassador for the NYS Canal System and, with renewed investment, should be able to continue serving that role for many years to come.

Communities embrace visits by the *Urger* and through its participation in various events and festivals the *Urger* helps produce significant economic impact. The *Urger* has helped educate more than 100,000 students enabling them to see and experience first-hand an operating Canal System outside of the classroom.

Our initial understanding of costs to remove and place the *Urger* in a static position on land lead us to believe that the more cost effective approach may be to repair the *Urger* and allow her to continue serving her critical and active role. At this time, we do not support placing the *Urger* on land, including at Thruway Rest Area/E-13.

ALTERNATIVES AND PROCESS

ECNHC encourages NYSCC/NYPA to explore all reasonable means to minimize any adverse impacts that disposition of vessels may have. All methods of preservation should be fully explored in partnership with canal communities, maritime and other historical/cultural groups. Documentation-only should be a final act, only if no alternatives for preservation or reuse exist.

Disposition activities appear to be occurring quickly and **we ask that the process slow down and become more open and transparent.** Public and stakeholder input should be more methodical in the spirit of New York State and federal historic preservation laws and regulations.

Many partners, including the NYS Historic Preservation Office, the NYS Museum, the Preservation League of NYS, Canal Society of NYS, and the Erie Canal Museum appear ready and willing to participate in productive conversations. The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor stands ready to engage in developing short and long-term solutions.

SUMMARY

In summary, our key recommendations include:

- Make available a list of all vessels proposed for disposition or removal from service and any current or pending plans for use or disposition
- Work to keep Tug *Urger* in active use on waterway
- Explore means to minimize any adverse impacts of vessel disposition

- Engage with public and canal-focused groups for alternatives to disposition for vessels with historic significance or potential educational or tourism value.

Please do not hesitate to call upon us if we can be of any assistance with these challenging issues as we all work together toward a thriving NYS Canal System and Canalway Corridor.

Thank you for your consideration.

ABOUT THE ERIE CANALWAY NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR

The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor (ECNHC) was established in 2000 through an act of Congress to recognize the national significance of New York State's canal system and the role it played in the development of the United States.

Our mission is to engage in historic preservation, interpretation, tourism, recreation, conservation and community development, with partners, and celebrate and enhance the Corridor's national significance for all to use and enjoy.

ECNHC preserves and interprets our extraordinary canal heritage, promotes the Corridor's world-class recreational and educational opportunities and helps foster vibrant communities connected by our waterways.

ECNHC works to improve the quality of life in more than 230 communities occupied by more than 3.2 million people and is helping guide the re-emergence of the Erie Canalway in the 21st century.

A Preservation and Management Plan was approved by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior and the Governor of NYS that articulates our goals, objectives and implementation strategies. The plan may be found on ECNHC's website: <https://eriecanalway.org/resources/preserve-plan>