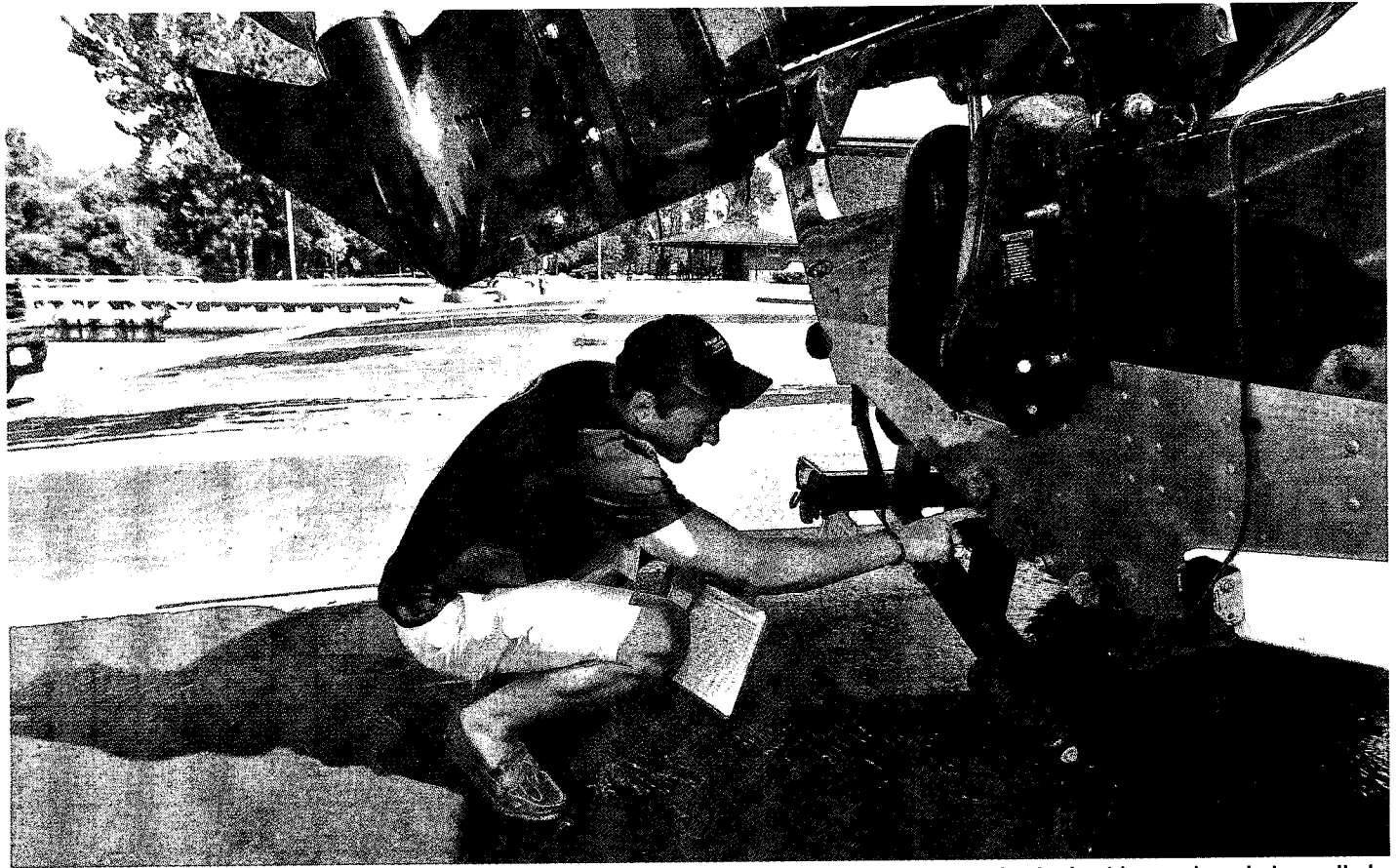


# STEWARDS SCAN BOATS FOR UNWANTED SPECIES



Cam Mathieu, a Hobart College student, checks for any invasive plants or animals that may have hitched a ride on a boat being pulled from Canandaigua Lake. The Finger Lakes Institute runs a program to prevent invasive species from spreading to other bodies of water.

JAMIE GERMANO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

## They aim to stop spread of noxious weeds, clams

**Steve Orr**

Staff writer

Don Hall had just motored in from a fishing trip on sunlit Canandaigua Lake when he was met at the boat launch by a polite young man in a red T-shirt.

Improbably, the young man wanted to chat; not about fish, but about clams and weeds — invasive clams, weeds and other unwanted aquatic species. So as Hall secured his boat to his trailer and stowed his gear, Sandro Valle gave him a 30-second primer on invasives and scanned Hall's boat for signs of them.

Valle, a 2011 graduate of Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, is a watercraft steward — a paid educator who interacts with boaters to help pre-

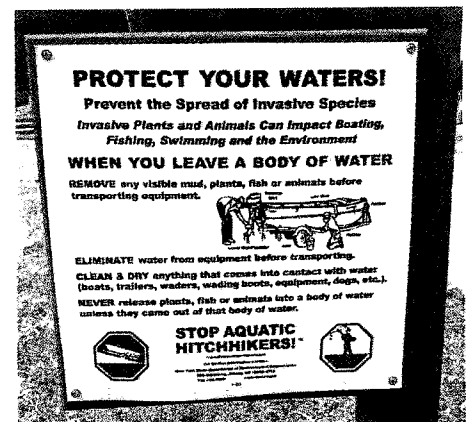
### INSIDE

Task force tries to stop spread of invasive plant hydrilla in Finger Lakes, 4B.

vent the spread of invasive species from one lake to another.

Stewards are being deployed for the first time this summer on seven larger Finger Lakes, from Canandaigua east to Otisco, and Sodus, Port and Little Sodus bays on Lake Ontario in Wayne and Cayuga counties.

The stewards, all college students or recent grads with an interest in environmental science, say the program seems to be going well.



This is a warning sign about invasive species at Canandaigua Lake State Marine Park. STEVE ORR/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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# Invasive

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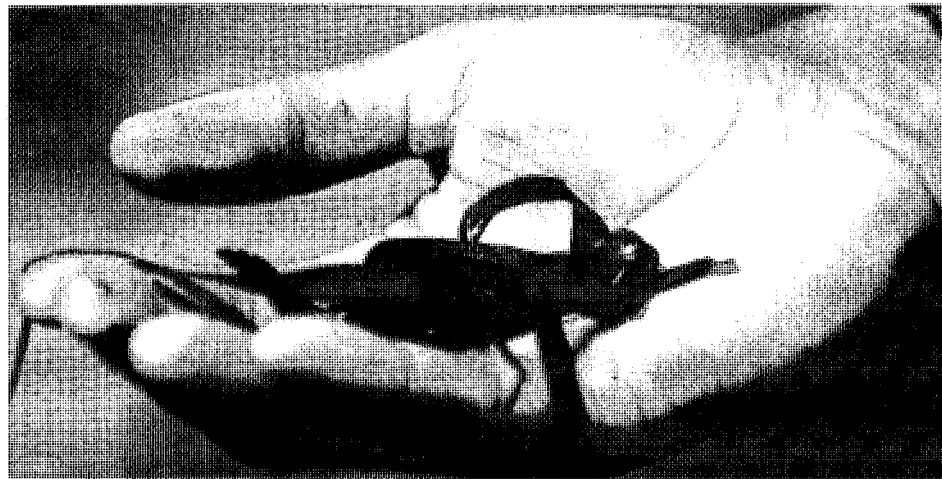
"I was actually very surprised how knowledgeable people are," said Jasmin Rostamzeshad, a Hobart student from Vermont. "Everyone's been receptive. Some people will be a little cranky, but for the most part they're fine."

Fisherman Hall, who lives in Farmington, was more than happy to let Valle, of Rochester, look over his boat and trailer for signs of unwanted hitchhikers. None were found.

Later, Hall said he'd learned something. "I didn't know that much about taking stuff from lake to lake," he said. Of the steward program, he said, "If it makes people more aware of what's going on, that's a good thing."

The watercraft steward program for the Finger Lakes and bays is managed by Hobart's Finger Lakes Institute and funded through the federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. Stewards have worked for several years at lakes in the Adirondacks and other parts of the state, but began in this region in May. They plan to work through the summer.

Nine stewards split their time at 16 boat launches, with a tenth



Common water weed is often found on boats in our area. JAMIE GERMANO STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

steward joining the team next month. They approach people who are putting boats into the water or taking them out, and are rebuffed only occasionally.

Unlike some states, New York has no law that mandates boat inspection or cleaning, so the stewards apply persuasion.

"It's a really quick inspection and a quick chat. We're trying not to interfere with people's activities," said Lisa Cleckner, the institute's director. "They help people go through the parts of the boat and the trailer, just looking at places where people might not check."

Bits of unwanted plants can attach to boat hulls, propellers or trailers. Mussels can attach themselves as well, and clams can be trapped in mud or weeds stuck to the craft. Bait wells and other

water reservoirs on the boats also can harbor undesirable passengers.

The advice is to remove all such material as soon as the craft leaves a given lake, and re-check the vessel before entering another water body.

Of the 16 inspection points, four are at Cayuga Lake — ground zero these days when it comes to aquatic invaders, thanks to the discovery late last summer of hydrilla verticillata in Cayuga Inlet at the south end of the lake.

Hydrilla, native to Asia, was brought to this continent years ago as an aquarium plant. In the wild, it can literally take over a lake or stream, crowding out native plants and making swimming or boating almost impossible.

Experts fear it could take root in Cayuga Lake proper and move from

there to other Finger Lakes, the Erie Canal and even Lake Ontario.

"The spread of hydrilla through this part of New York state could be disastrous," said Chuck O'Neill, a Honeoye Falls resident who is director of the state-funded New York Invasive Species Clearinghouse.

Hydrilla's discovery set off a desperate attempt to contain it. Hand-harvesting of hydrilla plants and use of herbicides are part of the program; some boat launch sites on Cayuga were closed for two days last week for an application of chemical weed killer.

The stewards present another line of defense. They've gone to a hydrilla workshop and carry laminated photos to help identify it. So far, they haven't seen any.

While a boat being trai-

## PREVENTING INVASIVES' SPREAD

- » Always clean the boat and trailer as soon as the boat is removed from the water. Remove plant material, fish or other animals and mud.
- » Check propellers, fish-finders, anchors and ropes and other objects that extend below the waterline. Clean fishhooks of weeds and mud.
- » Drain the boat and empty water reservoirs such as bait buckets and live wells.
- » Discard solid material in a designated area or, if none, nearby but away from the water. Make sure boat and equipment are dry before launching in another lake.

lered in from another state or Canada could be harboring any number of invasive species, the most likely suspects are those already established in upstate New York. This includes such plants as water chestnut, Eurasian water milfoil and water lettuce, as well as zebra and quagga mussels and Asian clams.

"I'm going to say there are a dozen or dozen-and-a-half fairly high priority ones for this part of the state," O'Neill said. None is uniformly established in every lake and bay, making containment the desired objective.

Among the newer menaces are Asian clams, whose presence in Canandaigua Lake was just confirmed, Cleckner said. The coin-sized clams don't adhere to surfaces like mussels but can still clog water intakes and the like.

They filter-feed on algae except for the blue-green varieties, which

they reject. This creates competitive advantage for the blue-greens, and clams are often blame for serious blue-green algae problems at Owassaugo Lake in Cayuga County. Blue-green algae, which are actually a form of bacteria, can release toxins that are harmful to humans, pets and wildlife.

Eradication of the established invasive species such as milfoil and mussels has proved elusive and the best that can be hoped in many cases is to prevent them from spreading.

It's an uphill battle, though stewards say, but their program helps. "The main purpose is education, making people aware," said Jacob Schreiber, who manages the steward program. "Hopefully they start cleaning their own boats and we'll go from there."

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