

Lake Waramaug Watercraft Inspection & Decontamination Program

Frequently Asked Questions

A joint initiative of the Lake Waramaug Conservancy, the Lake Waramaug Authority, and the Towns of Washington, Warren, and Kent, Connecticut

Effective Opening Day: Saturday, April 18, 2026

This FAQ answers the most common questions boaters, anglers, paddlers, and lake residents have about the Lake Waramaug Watercraft Inspection and Decontamination (WID) Program. If you have a question that is not answered here, please contact us at LakeWaramaugWIDProgram@gmail.com

About the Program

What is the Lake Waramaug WID Program?

The Lake Waramaug Watercraft Inspection and Decontamination (WID) Program is a prevention program designed to keep aquatic invasive species (AIS) out of Lake Waramaug. As discussed below, hydrilla and zebra mussels are of particular concern at the moment. The WID program has two components: inspection of all boats arriving at the Washington Town Boat Ramp, and, *as needed*, hot-water decontamination at a mobile facility based at the New Preston Fire Station, 1.2 miles from the ramp. See '***What Happens at the Ramp***' below for information as to when decontamination is required.

How do I get my boat decontaminated: walk-in or by appointment?

Both. The decontamination station operates on an abridged schedule running parallel to the ramp hours. Appointments are available for boaters who want to minimize waiting by sending an email to LakeWaramaugWIDProgram@gmail.com. All emails will be answered within 48 hours.

Who operates the program?

The program is a partnership between the Lake Waramaug Conservancy (LWC), the Lake Waramaug Authority (LWA), and the Towns of Washington, Warren, and Kent. The Town of Washington employs all program staff. Day-to-day operations are led by a WID-qualified Program Director, with inspection and decontamination services delivered by trained inspectors at the ramp and trained technicians at the decontamination facility.

When does the program start?

Inspection services will commence with the opening of the Washington boat ramp on April 18, 2026. Decontamination services are already being provided to companies installing docks, and boats will be eligible to be decontaminated from Monday, April 13. See below for more information about hours and contacts.

Why is this program necessary now?

A new and especially aggressive genotype of hydrilla — a federally listed aquatic noxious weed first identified in the Connecticut River — has spread to more than two dozen Connecticut waterbodies in just a few years, causing significant environmental and economic harm. Zebra mussels, the most damaging and costly AIS in North America, are now established in multiple

Connecticut lakes within a short drive of Waramaug. Trailered boats are the primary vector for transmission of AIS between geographically separate waterbodies.

What is the authority for this program?

The 2004 Lake Waramaug Agreement governs boating access to Lake Waramaug. This agreement, signed by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, and the three towns, requires that motorboats be launched into Lake Waramaug only after they have passed a mandatory inspection for environmental fitness by the Town of Washington. The WID program enables the Town of Washington to continue to meet its obligations under the agreement.

What Happens at the Ramp

What should I do before I arrive at the ramp?

Be certain your watercraft, trailer, and gear are clean, drained, and dry. All boats not covered by a Marina Vessel Certification under a Marina Manifest Agreement (see 'Marina Manifest Agreements' below) must complete full hot-water decontamination at the New Preston Fire Station before their initial launch into Lake Waramaug each season.

After decontamination, boats and trailers will receive a tamper-evident security seal. On subsequent arrival at the Washington Town Ramp, the inspector will confirm the seal is intact and approve the boat for launching. On exiting the lake, all boats will be eligible to have a new security seal fitted for easy return.

No vessel will be turned away without being given a clear path to launch, save in extreme circumstances.

What happens at the ramp, and how long does it take?

At the ramp, the inspector's role is verification, not hands-on inspection. The inspector checks for one of three things: (1) an intact security seal linking your boat to your trailer, with a serial number matching the record in the program log; (2) a fresh seal applied at the New Preston Fire Station after a decontamination; or (3) a Marina Vessel Certification form signed by a participating marina confirming that your boat has remained stored off-water in the marina's custody since its last removal from Lake Waramaug. If any of these is in place, the inspector removes the seal (where present) and clears you to launch — typically in a few minutes. If not, you will be directed 1.2 miles to the New Preston Fire Station for full hot-water decontamination before launch. The detailed hands-on inspection of hull, live wells, bilge, ballast tanks, engine intakes, trailer bunks, and interior compartments happens at the New Preston facility as part of the decontamination process.

What does this cost me?

The \$25 annual sticker fee, plus \$5 per launch inspection fee remains in place as in prior seasons. Decontamination at the New Preston Fire Station is free to the boater. The Lake Waramaug Conservancy paid for the physical Mobile Decontamination Unit, and the three towns (Washington, Warren, and Kent) will be covering the operating costs. The Conservancy and the Lake Waramaug Authority will continue to support the program as needed by way of fundraising, technical advice, volunteer coordination, and outreach.

What about boats leaving Lake Waramaug?

Every boat that enters Lake Waramaug must also exit through the Washington Town Ramp where an inspector is present — the seal system depends on every haul-out being witnessed

and logged. Exit handling at the ramp is brief. The inspector will apply and record a new seal if you plan to return.

Upon exiting (preferred) or at home (before next launch) good boating etiquette is to remove plants and mud, clean the anchor and rope/chain, fully drain the watercraft by removing drain plugs and emptying the bilge, live wells, interior compartments, and ballast. Lay out your life jackets and equipment to dry. Do your very best to get your watercraft, trailer, and equipment clean, drained, and dry before going boating again – all Connecticut lake users will thank you.

Marina Manifest Agreements

What is a Marina Manifest Agreement?

A Marina Manifest Agreement is a signed agreement between a participating marina and the Lake Waramaug WID Program. It establishes the marina as a participant in the program and allows the marina to certify individual boats for exemption from season-opening decontamination using a separate per-boat Marina Vessel Certification form. Winter storage in outdoor marina yards effectively sterilizes AIS through prolonged cold and dry conditions. Marinas may enter into an agreement at any time, and there is no geographic restriction. Agreements are effective for the 2026 boating season and must be renewed annually. Boat owners should ask their marina directly whether it plans to enter into a Marina Manifest Agreement. Marinas with questions about the program can contact LakeWaramaugWIDProgram@gmail.com

My boat is stored at a marina over the winter. What does this mean for me?

If your marina has signed a Marina Manifest Agreement with the program, your boat is eligible for exemption from season-opening decontamination. Your marina handles the per-boat Vessel Certification as part of its normal spring delivery routine — no action is required from you. If you prefer full decontamination regardless, you may decline coverage and request standard processing at the New Preston Fire Station. If you are not sure whether your marina has an agreement in place, ask the marina directly or contact the program at LakeWaramaugWIDProgram@gmail.com

How does the marina certification process work?

At spring delivery, the marina provides the WID inspector at the ramp with a signed Marina Vessel Certification form for each boat, attesting that the boat was removed from Lake Waramaug in the fall, was stored continuously in the marina's custody, has not been launched or transported to any other waterbody, and is clean, drained, and dry. No owner involvement is required at delivery time — marinas can run their normal pick-up-and-launch routine without the owner needing to be present. Boats arriving at a participating marina mid-season that were not in the marina's custody since their last removal from Lake Waramaug are not eligible for Vessel Certification and require full decontamination at the New Preston Fire Station before launch.

What if my boat is taken out of Lake Waramaug mid-season for repairs or service?

When your boat is removed from Lake Waramaug mid-season, the inspector at the ramp will fit a security seal linking boat to trailer, just as with any other haul-out. If the boat returns to the ramp with the seal intact and verified, it launches without decontamination. If the seal was broken during the repair (because the boat needed to be separated from the trailer, launched elsewhere for testing, or otherwise handled in a way that required breaking the seal), the boat must complete full hot-water decontamination at the New Preston Fire Station before re-launching. Dock-side service that does not remove the boat from Lake Waramaug -- for

example, a mechanic coming to your slip -- does not trigger any of this, because the boat has not left the water.

How does the program handle marina delivery trailers?

Many boats stored at participating marinas are delivered to Lake Waramaug on trailers owned by the marina, not the boat owner. Because those trailers often circulate to other waterbodies, they cannot be automatically covered by the marina's Vessel Certification for the boat itself.

A participating marina may designate specific trailers for same-day deliveries to Lake Waramaug. Designated trailers must complete one full decontamination at the start of each delivery day and receive a physical tag that an inspector can verify at the ramp for repeated same-day deliveries. These trailers must not be used in another waterbody between Lake Waramaug deliveries. Tags that are lost or damaged must be replaced at the New Preston Fire Station after decontamination; until re-tagged, the trailer reverts to non-designated status.

Decontamination at the New Preston Fire Station

Why decontamination at the fire station and not at the ramp?

Space, drainage, environmental protection, safety, and operational practicality. The Washington Town Ramp is a narrow, high-traffic access point where a full decontamination pad would create congestion and environmental compliance challenges. The New Preston Fire Station is 1.2 miles from the ramp, has the space to host the mobile unit, and allows inspection and decontamination to operate on parallel tracks without bottlenecking the ramp. This is the same two-station model used successfully at Lake George and other major lake programs.

How does hot-water decontamination work, and will it damage my boat?

The mobile unit sprays the exterior of the boat, trailer, and motor. Internal water systems are flushed with water heated to approximately 120°F – 140°F. Peer-reviewed research has established that water at this temperature kills AIS, and it is below any temperature that would damage gelcoat, paint, aluminum, rubber, or electronics. Flow rates and pressures are carefully controlled. Thousands of boats are decontaminated at this temperature every year nationwide without damage.

How long does decontamination take?

Most decontaminations take between 10 and 20 minutes for the average trailered, motorized watercraft. The most complex vessels — those with ballast tanks, multiple live wells, inboard or I/O motors, or heavy biofouling — can take 45 to 60 minutes. Boats that are dirty or wet will take even longer; clean, drained, and dry boats will be very quick. The technician will give you a realistic time estimate before the work begins.

The Invasive Species We Are Trying to Stop

What is hydrilla, and why is it such a serious threat?

Hydrilla verticillata is a non-native submerged aquatic plant that grows in dense mats from the lake bottom to the surface, crowding out native vegetation, collapsing fish habitat, and making swimming, paddling, and boating difficult or impossible. The new Connecticut River genotype is especially aggressive and spreads from tiny stem fragments that can hitchhike on trailers, in live wells, or tangled in propellers. Once established, it is extraordinarily expensive and difficult to control. Prevention is the only realistic defense.

What about zebra and quagga mussels?

Zebra and quagga mussels are small, sharp-shelled freshwater mussels that attach to nearly any hard surface. They clog water intakes, damage engines, cut swimmers' feet, crust over docks and moorings, and fundamentally alter lake ecology. Adult mussels and their microscopic larvae travel between waterbodies in standing water in bilges, wells, ballast, and engines — which is exactly what decontamination is designed to eliminate.

Are there other AIS you are watching for?

Yes. Curly-leaf pondweed, water chestnut, spiny water flea, and several others. The inspection and decontamination protocols are designed to address the full suite of known aquatic invasive species, not just the top-of-mind threats.

Different Types of Boats and Users

Does this apply to kayaks, canoes, and paddleboards?

Yes. Hand-carried non-motorized craft can carry plant fragments in skegs, hatches, bungees, and wet bags. Inspection of non-motorized craft is quick and typically does not require hot-water decontamination, but the Clean-Drain-Dry principle applies equally. Car-top vessels that fail to meet the Clean-Drain-Dry standard at the ramp will be directed to the New Preston decontamination station before launch.

What about rental, demonstration, and new boats?

Rental, demonstration, and new boats must complete full hot-water decontamination at the New Preston Fire Station before their initial launch into Lake Waramaug each season. These categories cannot be reliably verified by visual inspection alone, and hot-water decontamination is the only way to establish the clean baseline the seal system depends on.

Are out-of-state boats welcome?

Yes, provided they comply with the inspection program and any applicable town ramp rules. The program is not designed to exclude anyone; it is designed to ensure that every boat arrives Clean, Drained, and Dry, or is decontaminated prior to launching. A visiting boat that completes decontamination and receives a security seal may return to Lake Waramaug on any future date. There is no time limit on an intact seal, if the boat has not been in any other waterbody since the seal was applied.

What if I am a lake resident and launch from a private dock?

Private dock launches of watercraft onto Lake Waramaug are not permitted. The Washington Town Ramp is the designated public access point, and lake residents who transport a boat to another waterbody and back must bring it through the Washington Ramp inspection and decontamination process on return.

What about small car-top boats launched from the State Park or the Washington Ramp?

Under the 2004 Lake Waramaug Agreement, motor-equipped boats with no greater than a twelve (12) horsepower outboard motor — boats transported on top of an automobile, or inside a van or pickup truck, and whose unloading requires no more than two people (“Car-top Boats”) — may be launched from the Lake Waramaug State Park or the Washington Ramp only after they have been inspected for environmental fitness and have received a sticker confirming they are environmentally suitable. The WID Program integrates with and supports this existing inspection requirement.

I keep my boat on Lake Waramaug all season. Do I still need to be inspected?

It depends on how your boat is stored over the off-season. If your boat overwinters at a participating marina with a Marina Manifest Agreement, no season-opening decontamination is required — the marina handles the per-boat Vessel Certification at delivery. If your boat overwinters elsewhere but arrives in the spring with an intact security seal from the previous fall's haul-out, the seal is your verification and no decontamination is needed. Otherwise, it must complete the season-opening decontamination at the New Preston Fire Station before its initial launch of the season. After that one decontamination, the security seal handles every subsequent launch quickly.

How You Can Help

How can I support the program?

The most important thing any boater can do is arrive Clean, Drained, and Dry — every time, at every launch, at every lake. Beyond that:

- Report suspected invasive species or a boat bypassing the inspection station.
- Volunteer with the Lake Waramaug Conservancy's outreach and education efforts.
- Contribute financially through the Lake Waramaug Conservancy.
- Share the Clean-Drain-Dry message with fellow boaters, anglers, and paddlers.

Where can I learn more?

Program updates, operating hours, volunteer opportunities, and the latest information on aquatic invasive species in Connecticut are posted on the program websites listed below. Additional resources are available through the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) and the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station.

Clean • Drain • Dry

Every boat. Every launch. Every lake.

For more information, visit:

www.lakewaramaug.org (Lake Waramaug Conservancy)

www.lakewaramaugauthority.org (Lake Waramaug Authority)

www.washingtonct.org (Town of Washington)

www.warrenct.org (Town of Warren)

www.townofkentct.org (Town of Kent)