



Connecticut Department of
**ENERGY &
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION**

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**TOWN OF BOLTON
SELECTMEN'S OFFICE**

Robert R. Morra
First Selectman
Town of Bolton
222 Bolton Center Road
Bolton, CT 06043

Dear Selectman Morra:

This letter concerns the resumption of channel catfish stocking in Lower Bolton Lake. As you know, staff from DEEP, including Fisheries Biologist Justin Davis and Pete Aarrestad (Director of Inland Fisheries Division) have made substantial efforts to meet with local officials and with representatives of the Friends of Bolton Lakes (FOBL) over the last three years to discuss water quality issues and fisheries management programs in the Bolton Lakes. Most recently, staff attended meetings at the Bolton Town Hall on December 21, 2015 and again on April 11, 2016.

As you know, the Inland Fisheries Division has consistently held that channel catfish pose no threat to water quality in Lower Bolton Lake, a position that was well-supported by available evidence when this process began in 2013, an which has only become more evident as additional studies have been completed at the lake. Members of FOBL have suggested that scientific studies conducted in European lakes with very different fish species than those found here in Northeastern US lakes support their position that channel catfish can negatively impact water quality. This scientific literature is irrelevant to the role (or lack thereof) that channel catfish play in nutrient loading at Lower Bolton Lake, as was convincingly demonstrated by the town's consultant, Dr. George Knoecklein of Northeast Aquatic Research during discussions at the April 11 meeting. Though it is unfortunate that the lake experienced phytoplankton blooms in 2015, the fact remains that there is no credible, scientifically-valid linkage between water quality issues and the stocking of and/or presence of channel catfish in the lake.

A few members of FOBL have also gone to great lengths to oppose channel catfish stocking on the rationale that they are a non-native fish (e.g., there were no fewer than seven references to "non-native channel catfish" in the April 12 letters sent to various members of the CT General Assembly by FOBL). As was discussed during the April 11 meeting, CT and other NE states have a long history of introducing non-native fishes to support recreational fishing in our public waters. Two of those non-native fishes, largemouth bass and smallmouth bass, are the most popular freshwater sportfish in our State; moreover, they are both found in quantity in Lower Bolton Lake. The presence of bass in the lake and the fishing opportunities they provide have been enthusiastically endorsed by several members of FOBL throughout this process – in contradiction to their professed stance that the presence of non-native fish in Lower Bolton Lake is undesirable and inadvisable. The simple fact is that ~50 percent of the fish species in our inland waters - including Lower Bolton Lake- are non-native to the State, a condition that has little to no bearing on the general water quality of our inland waters.

The Inland Fisheries Division annually stocks 26 separate water bodies (not including Lower Bolton Lake) across the state with channel catfish to enhance recreational fishing opportunities for the general public, including waters owned by public water supply utilities that are open to fishing. At none of these other sites have concerns been either expressed or realized regarding potential degradation of water quality or related adverse effects.

Regrettably, I am instructing our staff to hold off on the stocking the lake again this year. Determining our stocking options for 2017 will be informed by the final results reported on by Dr. Knoecklein and his staff, the professional opinions of DEEP staff, and other considerations.

I truly hope the town and other parties are able to determine the true causes of water quality impairments recently experienced at Lower Bolton Lake, and that some level of restoration to previous conditions is possible. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns. You can also contact Pete Aarrestad, Director of the Inland Fisheries Division at 860-424-FISH.

Sincerely,



Susan Whalen
Deputy Commissioner
Environmental Conservation

cc:

State Representative Tim Ackert – 8th District
State Senator Steve Cassano - 4th District
Daniel A. Champagne – Mayor of Vernon
State Representative Claire Janowski – 56th District
State Representative Gayle Mulligan – 55th District