

Senate Bill Aims to Preserve Full Canal Operating Season and Resources for Marine Interests

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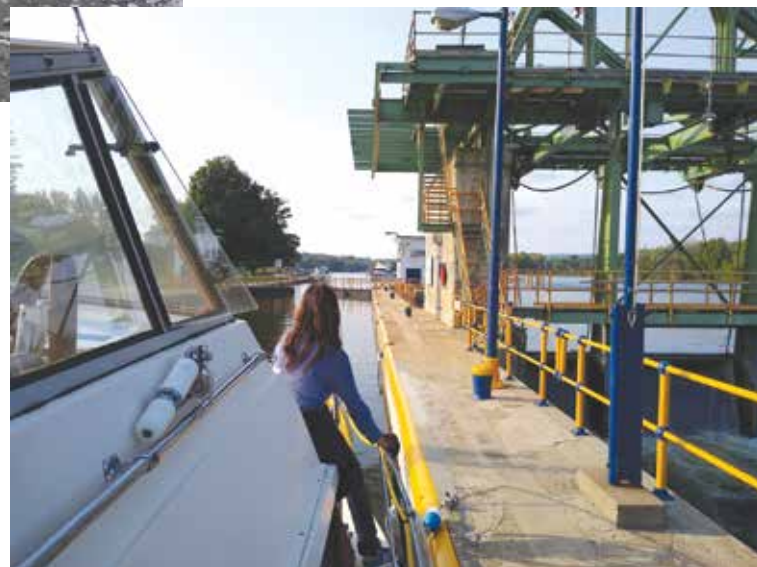
Senator Rachel May (D-53rd Senate District), joined by her colleagues Pamela Helming (R-54th Senate District), Michelle Hinchey (D-46th Senate District) and Daphne Jordan (R-43rd Senate District) have introduced a bill (S.5958, now in Committee) that “expands use of state drydock facilities for commercial vessels such as tour boats to include Coast Guard drydock inspections and winter storage, and formally adopts in statute a Canal System navigation season that supports optimum use of the Erie Canal.”

The proposed statutory navigation season would be early May to early November, subject to natural conditions, weather, maintenance needs, etc. and preserve “structures, floating plant and unique landside features” of the Erie Canal. It would also make provision for commercial boats to use canal system resources for off season storage, or to make emergency repairs at rates prescribed by the New York State Codes, Rules and Regulations.

This is a significant step and will, if passed, codify certain aspects of canal system operation that marine interests strongly support. The Capital Region Chamber has submitted a memo in support of this proposed legislation. Please visit <https://capitalregionchamber.com/legislative-memos/> for details. In the Assembly, Marianne Buttenschon (D - District 119), has sponsored a similar piece of legislation (A.7044) alongside cosponsors John McDonald III (D - District 108) and Sarah Clark (D - District 136).

A companion bill, S.5959, addresses questions surrounding the Canal Recreationway Commission, which was created in 1992 to advise the Canal Corporation. The legislation points out that the Commission has not met since NYPA took over administration of the Canal System in 2017.

If you are supportive of these canal related bills, please become informed by visiting the corresponding Senate and Assembly websites and contact your area representatives to let them know this is important to your enjoyment of recreational boating or your livelihood in the marine profession.



Will the future of the New York State Canal System be one of boats of all shapes and sizes enjoying 524 miles of pristine inland waterways? Or will boaters be left high and dry by changing sentiments at the state level regarding the length of the operating season, controlling depths, concerns over invasive species and flood control, and of the very nature and reason for being of the canal itself? S.5958 and its companion pieces of legislation are an attempt to codify answers to those questions into New York State statutes.



MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

S.5958 (May)

AN ACT to amend the canal law, in relation to the general powers and duties of the canal corporation

The Capital Region Chamber, representing 2,900 businesses and organizations from throughout the Capital Region that employ more than 160,000 area residents, supports S.5958, which would amend the canal law, in relation to the general powers and duties of the canal corporation.

Specifically, this legislation would expand the use of state drydock facilities for commercial vessels such as tour boats to include Coast Guard drydock inspections and winter storage, and formally adopts in statute a Canal System navigation season that supports optimum use of the Erie Canal.

This legislation would ensure that the canal operating season is of sufficient length to best serve the thousands of local and transient vessels which ply its waters every year. The bill would keep canal structures intact and ensure that state-owned land and assets are used for the benefit of local business as well as the economically challenged canal communities. These are very significant goals, especially given the transportation and infrastructure changes that will be necessary to guide New York State’s economy in the decades ahead in a post-COVID world and informed by global supply chain considerations.

The Chamber is a proud sponsor of America’s Great Loop and we interact with transient boaters on a regular basis. Businesses associated with the Chamber have delivered the first non-fossil-fuel cargo in Erie Canal history, become the first-ever USCG-certified solar electric tour vessels, and have used conventionally powered tugs and barges to move major cargoes on these waters. In the past year alone, we have had five expressions of interest by marine cargo entities and have been unable to act on them due to the constraints of the current constraints and the COVID-19 crisis. Rather than lessen the usefulness of the 524-mile New York State Canal System, now is the time to preserve all possible marine transportation options to prepare for the needs of tomorrow. The Erie Canal is about to turn 200 years old. With proper planning, its third century may turn out to be its most significant.

For these stated reasons, the Capital Region Chamber recommends the passage of this legislation.

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