



The Champlain Canal Opens 2022 Season



With an Operational Surprise!

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Boaters traveling north through the Champlain Canal please note: your travel plans just got a little more complicated.

Growing concerns about the impact of invasive species on upstate New York waterways have led to the implementation of a novel approach to manage the problem. For 2022, Lock C-1 will be operated using a “double flush” procedure, with the added stipulation that northbound boats will be locked through on a set operating schedule, with lengthy wait times (2 hours) in between. The hope is that this process will prevent the round goby, a small but detrimental fish, from making its way northward from Waterford, where it has been seen, to Lake Champlain.

Mohawk Maiden Cruises operates two tour vessels out of its base in Schuylerville near Lock C-5, and its business has been significantly impacted by operational changes to the Canal System in recent years. The Capital Region Chamber secured Pandemic-related funding to assist them in literally staying afloat.



New York State Canal Corporation Director Brian Stratton points to a historical site marker during a recent cleanup day for the historic Champlain Canal in Waterford, just west of the present-day waterway.

"The Canal Corporation is proactively partnering with DEC to ensure the Canal system helps implement any necessary steps, including education and awareness programming, to combat against invasive fish, like the round goby, and other aquatic invasive species, while at the same time ensuring the Canal remains a driver of economic activity and a thriving tourist destination," said Canal Corporation Director Brian U. Stratton in a recent press release. "As we implement risk reduction strategies along on the Champlain Canal this season, we ask users and stakeholders for their patience and encourage them to learn how they can assist in mitigating the spread of aquatic invasives species to ensure the Canal's resiliency for generations to come."

Some upstate canal-related business owners are unhappy with this move, citing the disruptions to the schedule, and the lack of notice given to the community that this change was even going to take place. Environmental advocacy groups had been urging for a complete and permanent closure of one Champlain Canal lock, thus rendering the waterway useless to all boats hoping to transit it. In a compromise move, working "groups" of business and community stakeholders had been advised that a simpler version of this double flush procedure was going to be done up at Locks 7 and 8, which are further north, near the summit level of the Champlain Canal and see far less boat traffic (only cruising boats and a few local



The author (left) with Larry Ascenzi of Lock One Marina and Shipyard, during a recent inspection tour of Lock C-2 near Mechanicville. The Canal Corporation periodically drains certain locks in order to completely inspect and overhaul their working mechanisms during the winter. It's a 12 month operation!

vessels plus any commercial traffic are seen that far from Waterford). But, the day before the Canal System opened, everyone was notified of the changes described above, an action which incensed some who had been working to adapt to the previously notified changes that were now shelved.



Will boats traveling in groups have problems with the restricted schedule for Lock C-1 on the Champlain Canal? Time will tell, as many questions remain unanswered, but the Canal Corporation appears to be doing its best to comply with various dictums impacting operations in favor of other interests such as invasive species and flood control, employee safety, and off-season maintenance considerations.

"The truth is, this last-minute change to the Canal operating procedure has had a significant impact on our business," said Captain Marla Hodge of Mohawk Maiden Cruises in Schuylerville (located at Lock C-5, (518) 636-6146, mohawkmaidencruises.com). "For one thing we had adapted our cruise schedule to the well-announced and planned double flushing that was supposed to take place north of us, and now all of those plans are in tatters with the added dimension of timed lock-throughs. Secondly, the rules regarding operations of vessels north of Waterford are now very unclear, and the limited access and extended locking times at Lock C-1, without question the Champlain Canal's busiest lock, ensure that mariners, especially ones heading northbound, will have to plan on lengthy delays before they can access the waterway. And what is the impact on other businesses in this corridor such as marinas, waterfront restaurants, etc.?"

Other business owners are more philosophical, trying to roll with the changes and adapt as best they can to the operations plan. "Our fuel business has been impacted this year by several factors," says Larry Ascenzi, co-owner along with brother Steve of Lock One Marina and Shipyard (461 Hudson River Rd, Waterford, NY 12188, (518) 238-1321,

lockonemarinaandshipyard.com). "It's hard to tell whether it's the price of fuel or the more complicated schedule to get here, but we have seen less of our regular customers. Still, the fuel docks remain open, and we are happy to serve our customers' needs. We can't stop fuel prices from being high, but ours are competitive with what you'll find out there."

To be sure, there are many uncertainties, and that means boaters need to plan ahead lest their voyages north be disrupted, and vacations ruined. "We strongly advise downstate boaters to take the schedule changes into account as they prepare for their trip," says Ascenzi, "so there are no surprises when they get up here. Northbound, Lock C-1 is open from 7am to 9pm, opening every two hours on the odd hour. If people factor this into their planning, they will still be able to enjoy a great trip up the Champlain Canal!"

For the latest on operational conditions, Lock closures or other day-to-day issues on the New York State Canal System, please choose "Notice to Mariners" at the canals.ny.gov website. For more information on Capital Region attractions and businesses on land and sea, visit capitalregionchamber.com.