

Text of LOPA-West 7/23/09 email to Berkshire Eagle:

Now that a several thoughtful people have expressed their concerns over the discovery of zebra mussels in Laurel Lake, I would like to share a few more thoughts. For several years, the members of the Lakes and Ponds Association of Western Massachusetts (LAPA) have been working to educate the boating public about zebra mussels. For those of you unfamiliar with LAPA it is an organization that works closely with state agencies in developing management policies for our Berkshire lakes and ponds.

With the discovery at Laurel, LAPA has suggested that the boat ramps be temporarily closed. Please note that LAPA's suggestion is to "temporarily" close them while the state agencies get their hands around the problem.

LAPA has always supported the right of all citizens of the Commonwealth to have access to the great ponds. We consider this right to be just as important as our first amendment right to "free speech". But as with free speech there comes the condition to act responsibly as in not shouting fire in a crowded theater. The condition here is that boats that have been exposed to infected waters must be cleaned. Unfortunately, many boaters either do not understand the circumstances of this or are unaware of the seriousness of the situation. What we can all appreciate is that, in the short term, by temporarily closing boat ramps, we will get the attention of all of the boating public. This is necessary because the very devastating nature of a zebra mussel infestation has not heretofore been adequately brought to the attention of the public.

Yes there is a price to temporary closure and it will upset a lot of boaters in the middle of the summer. Yet that price must be measured against the likelihood of uninformed boaters infecting more of the Berkshire lakes.

Jack Hickey

President of LAPA