



## On Disposal of Historic Canal Vessels by NYS Canal Corporation / NY Power Authority

### Background

- The Preservation League of New York State is New York's nonprofit statewide historic preservation organization. The Preservation League invests in people and projects that champion the essential role of preservation in community revitalization, sustainable economic growth and the protection of our historic buildings and landscapes. We lead advocacy, economic development and education programs across the state.
- The NYS Canal Corporation has successfully managed and maintained the New York State Canal System, [designated as a National Historic Landmark due to its span, scope, and historic integrity](#).
  - The historic vessels related to the NYS Canal System are a significant component of the system's integrity.
  - The National Historic Landmark designation notes the importance of the canal fleet and canal vessels to the New York State Canal System.
  - Several canal vessels are individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places, including the tugboat *Urger*, referred to as "[the flagship of the fleet of vessels operated by the New York State Canal Corporation on the 524-mile Canal System](#)" by the NYS Canal Corporation.

### Issues

- The Preservation League is troubled by the lack of an overall plan for the fleet of canal vessels that are part of the NYS Canal System. We do not know of such a plan nor of any public engagement regarding creation of a plan for the vessels. Recent actions by the New York Power Authority have jeopardized the future of the historic canal fleet.
- The Preservation League understands that the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has reviewed disposition of 13 vessels as part of Phases 0, 1, and 2 of artificial reef creation near Long Island. We understand that 3 of the 13 vessels in those phases are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.
  - Following consultation with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, we have been advised that there are no federal historic preservation review triggers as part of the Army Corps of Engineers permitting process for the artificial reefs.

- We understand there may be future phases of artificial reef construction, with up to a total of 30 vessels disposed of in the reefs.
- The Preservation League is deeply concerned about the disposition of the National Register-listed tugboat *Urger*, currently planned for a landlocked display off the NYS Thruway at the Lock 13/Taste of NY Visitor Center.
  - The *Urger* is one of only 27 vessels listed on the National Register in New York State and is listed as being of Statewide significance.
  - The *Urger* National Register designation references the tugboat's "long and historic association with the development of New York State's twentieth century canals" as well as its "representation of evolving twentieth century marine technology."
  - The *Urger* serves as a teaching vessel, moving along the canal system educating children and adults about the importance of New York State's inland waterways. Field trips on the *Urger* are frequently booked months in advance and are among the most popular 4<sup>th</sup> grade field trip in communities along the canals. According to the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, the *Urger* has educated over 100,000 students on the significance and history of the NYS Canal System.
  - The *Urger* provides hands-on access to New York State's history and development, not only to school groups, but to communities along the canal celebrating their heritage.
  - An immobile exhibit on the westbound NYS Thruway will remove the *Urger's* historic context by taking it out of the water, and will limit its geographic reach throughout New York State.

## **Recommendations**

- We appeal to the NYS Canal Corporation and New York Power Authority to maintain the tugboat *Urger* as New York's "Teaching Tug" and continue its use as an active canal vessel.
- We ask the NYS Canal Corporation and New York Power Authority to embrace transparency and work with stakeholder organizations on a plan for its fleet of canal vessels. This includes providing a list of all vessels that could be removed from service or planned for disposition.
- We urge the NYS Canal Corporation and New York Power Authority to follow the New York State Historic Preservation Act by eliminating any adverse impacts of their planned canal vessel disposition.