

Council attacks crippling plant

Contributed by Matt Dalen

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The Three Lakes Council is fighting a new potential threat to Lewisboro's lakes: *Egeria densa*, known variously as Brazilian waterweed or Brazilian elodea, is a highly invasive aquatic plant that has been found in Lake Waccabuc for the first time. The council has begun working to exterminate the weed from the lake before it can get a stronger foothold.

"It's limited to one cove of the lake, and it's somewhat dispersed in that cove," said council Vice President Janet Anderson. "We are hopeful that it might be practical to eradicate this entirely if we take the appropriate actions at the very early stage, while it is so limited in area in the lakes."

Samples of the weed were found during a plant survey undertaken by lake manager Chris Doyle of Allied Biological Inc. at the request of the council. According to the council, this is the first known infestation in Westchester County.

Now that the plant has been located, the council is studying different options for its removal before it can spread. This is the first time an invasive species has been found this early in one of Lewisboro's lakes, so it might be possible to eliminate it early.

The council is also monitoring the lakes to see if the plant appears anywhere else on the shoreline. According to the council's Web page, *Egeria densa* can grow up to a foot a day under good conditions, and the plant can cover up to 100 acres per year. It grows underwater, and is distinguishable from related, native species by the leaves — *Egeria densa*'s are arranged in "whorls" of four to six long, thin leaves in successive levels, and they are generally more than half an inch long.

Ms. Anderson said anyone who finds a plant they do not recognize may contact her at fablesx2@optonline.net. More information on the weed and other invasive species may be found at the council's Web page, threelakescouncil.org.

About *Egeria densa*

A common aquarium plant, *Egeria densa* could have entered the lake after someone dumped aquarium water, or if someone had moved a boat from an infested lake and thus transported a fragment of the plant. According to the Invasive Plant Atlas of New England, based at the University of Connecticut, although the plant flowers, it usually reproduces through plant fragments — small segments of the plant can put down roots and regrow into a full plant.

While it is native to Brazil and other parts of South America, *Egeria densa* has expanded to countries in Europe, Asia and North America, as well as Australia and New Zealand. During the early 20th Century, it was sold as a popular aquarium plant, and was first seen here in the wild in Long Island in 1893. According to Ms. Anderson, it was confined to Long Island for a long time before recently being found in lakes in Harriman State Park and Orange County.

As with other invasive species, *Egeria densa* is known to crowd out native plants, while providing poor habitat for fish and interfering with recreational activities, according to the atlas. Efforts are under way in several states to fight its invasion.