

Waccabuc Cove weed removal plan presented

Contributed by Matt Dalen

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Four months after discovering a highly invasive aquatic plant in Lake Waccabuc, the Three Lakes Council is planning drastic measures to remove it. A plan presented at the Tuesday, Jan. 27, meeting of the Planning Board would essentially remove the top layer of the lake bottom over an area of nearly two acres, in hopes of capturing every fragment of *Egeria densa*, also known as Brazilian waterweed or Brazilian elodea. The plan would cover the entirety of Waccabuc Cove, a small cove on the north shore of the lake. So far, the plant has only been found in that cove.

"I want to start this as soon as possible," said Janet Andersen, who represented the council before the board. "If this thing is out somewhere else, the game's over."

The proposal is likely to go to a public hearing in March before the Planning Board rules on the permit.

Because only male specimens of Brazilian elodea have been brought to the United States, the weed cannot reproduce with seeds. However, a fragment of the weed can grow into a full plant, and it grows at an extremely fast pace, which makes it one of the worst aquatic invasive species.

"This is something which, certainly, it appears we have one attempt to hopefully eradicate," said town wetlands consultant Bruce Barber. "I'm not sure you have a real good second attempt at it if it starts to spread out in the lake area. We want to make sure we get this right the first time."

The proposal would close off the cove and use "suction harvesting" to suck the lake bottom into containers, which would then be disposed of. It's the hope of the council that this type of suction would be able to capture every fragment of the plant in the cove. This may be possible because the weed appears to be contained to just the cove, and wind and water currents both run into the cove, potentially isolating it.

Ms. Andersen said that an alternative — aquatic herbicide — had been considered, but that had run into several problems, the largest of which was residents of the lake community who use the lake for drinking water. At least 14 homes get their water supplies from the lake, according to Ms. Andersen, several of whom live on that cove. Aquatic herbicide would cut off the use of the water to those homes for at least two months, not only for drinking but also for showering and other uses.

The suction harvesting plan, which requires state approval in addition to town approval because the state owns the lake bottom, would cost at a minimum about \$15,000 per acre just for the suction itself, Ms. Andersen said. Additional costs, which have not been measured, would be incurred for obtaining a 400-foot net to block off the cove during the work and capture any fragments of the weed that drifted away, educating the public on what the work entails, and disposing of the material harvested from the bottom of the lake. The money would likely be obtained by the council through a fund-raiser, Ms. Andersen said.

Assuming all of the permits are received and the council can find an experienced manager to oversee the harvesting, the hope is to complete the work before the Fourth of July and before extensive boat traffic begins on the lake.

Board members asked about the potential impact on the cove's ecosystem. Ms. Andersen said that previous experience had shown that, after this kind of project, water plants repopulated the area quickly. She also said that, while a small number of fish might be caught in the suction harvest, they would likely flee from the commotion, and that there were no endangered or threatened fish in the lake. {sharethis}