

COLAM Seeks Statewide Weed Program

Milfoil tops the list of most wanted felons being hunted by a newly formed coalition of lake associations

by: a joint effort by members of COLAM

Erasion watermilfoil (milfoil) is an aggressive, noxious aquatic weed that is alien to North America. It robs lake users of recreational and scenic enjoyment of lakes and rivers. It displaces wildlife by destroying natural habitats. It destroys entire lake ecosystems. And it pushes property values downward until lakeside homes are virtually unsellable. Because it has no natural predators powerful enough to keep it in check, milfoil raises havoc nearly everywhere it takes root - unless someone intervenes to stop it.

The Coalition of Lakes Against Milfoil (COLAM), a group of lake associations, lake property owners and lake users, is concerned with the spreading despoilment of New York's lakes and waterways by milfoil.

Milfoil is no small problem in New York State. More than 40 of the state's 62 counties are now infested by milfoil, according to information obtained by COLAM. An estimated \$20 million is spent annually on weed control projects paid for by local assistance grants approved by the state legislature. The cost of privately-sponsored control projects is not readily available.

COLAM members see an urgent need for a coordinated plan to deal with the milfoil problem. Specifically COLAM is calling for adoption of a statewide aquatic weed management program. To be drafted by lake representatives themselves, such a program would likely include:

--facilitated funding from state sources for weed control

projects to be designed and implemented locally or regionally;

--simplified permitting for projects to control milfoil and other nuisance weeds;

--expedited approval of new control methods, especially those already approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and including new aquatic herbicides and biological control options.

Statewide Program Needed

"Milfoil is such a huge threat to lake ecosystems and lake economics that it is absolutely critical that New York face up to its responsibility to assist solutions", says COLAM president Wendy Davis. "Creating a coordinated, statewide aquatic weed control program similar to those in place in other states seems the best place to start."

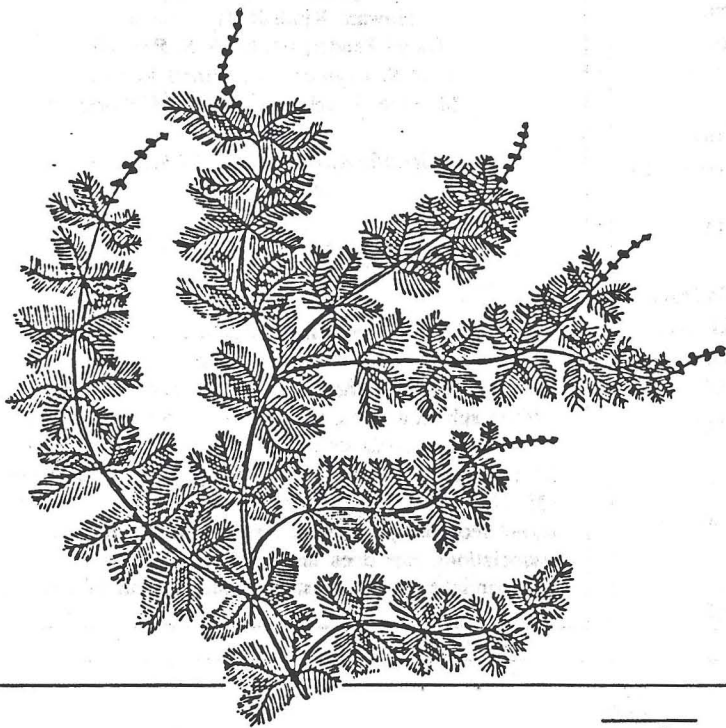
For instance, COLAM members think the state could begin by providing a top-notch clearinghouse for information about aquatic weeds and all possible control techniques. Available resources should include: funding; lists of weed control professionals; managers; scientists; a complete selection of educational materials and publications; and technical assistance should be available upon request.

Funding is Important

"The funding issue is very important but it should not be a stumbling block," Davis says. "We have learned that other states do a lot more with a lot less money than we do here in New York. And we have learned that New York could do a lot more with the money it is presently spending without a well-planned, well-coordinated program. For instance, the state of Florida sponsors a statewide program designed to assist effective action occurring at the local level. The state spends approximately \$10 million on weed control projects coordinated and implemented by the counties. Florida's program effectively managers many more lakes and waterways and much bigger weed problems than New York would ever expect to experience."

Permitting is a Problem

"Another big problem is permitting," Davis said. COLAM has collected information from each of DEC's nine regions and from the Adirondack Park Agency which indicates a total lack of consistency. Some regions require very little information while others require volumes, all for the same type of control. The APA requires so



much information that it is nearly impossible to get a permit before the information is outdated. COLAM recommends that the statewide program include a revised permitting process that is uniform throughout the state. This process must be efficient as well as user-friendly.

"We have also learned that it is good business to protect the value of our lakes from despoliation by milfoil," Davis says. A recent government study undertaken in the Okanagan Lake region in British Columbia, Canada, assessed the economic impact of Eurasian Watermilfoil on the areas \$200 million-a-year tourism economy. The study revealed that the decline of recreational use of lakes contaminated by milfoil is costing the area a staggering \$85 million a year in lost tourism revenues. This does not include the millions of dollars more in devalued property values which have resulted from the milfoil infestation. According to Canadian officials the study convincingly justifies its eight year program to control the weed.

"In New York, as in Canada, the question is not whether we can afford a coordinated, statewide control program," Davis said, "but whether we can afford not to have one."

To get the need for aquatic weed control program across to state officials, COLAM members have already hand-carried facts about milfoil and recommendations for a statewide program to the Governor's office, to legislators serving on the environmental conservation committees on both the Assembly and Senate, and to other appropriate agencies of the state. A similar effort is expected again this session.

COLAM was also successful in getting the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to hold public hearings on the advisability of the registration of fluridone (SONAR) for use in New York State. COLAM members testified at the hearings and encouraged written comments from concerned governments, chambers of commerce, business & lake users.

COLAM is now encouraging letters to DEC requesting a decision before January, 1993. They should be addressed to Commissioner Thomas Jorling, Department of Environmental Conservation, 50 Wolf Road, Albany, NY, 12233.

Since passing the Environmental Protection Agency's tests for environmental and human safety in 1986, SONAR has been registered in all mainland states except New York and California. The state of California, however, uses SONAR to combat hydrilla, an invasive weed that threatens agriculture by clogging irrigation ditches, streams and rivers. SONAR has earned a reputation around many experienced aquatic plant managers and lake scientists for eradication or control of Eurasian Milfoil.

COLAM is also keeping an eye on the possibilities of

milfoil eating weevils, caterpillars and moths. At a conference and workshop in Vermont this Spring, COLAM learned that this control option for the future may be a long way off. While hopeful, the research is only in the very early stages and the outcome is still unpredictable.

COLAM is Growing Quickly

Since its formation a year ago, COLAM's membership has grown to include representatives from 24 lake associations located in the Adirondack Region, the Southern Tier/Finger Lakes area and in the Capital District Region. Lake associations concerned about milfoil are welcome to join and association memberships are available for individual supporters. For additional information please contact: Wendy Davis, COLAM, ~~P.O. Box 70, Lake George, NY, 12845~~ **P.O. Box 143 Ticonderoga, NY 12883**

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