

Saratoga lake to use herbicide 03-30-2006

Lake herbicide impact studied

Saratoga improvement district wants to use chemical to kill off invasive weed growing in water

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MALTA -- A report on the potential environmental effects of a herbicide designed to kill Eurasian water milfoil in Saratoga Lake will be available in early summer.

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The Saratoga Lake Protection and Improvement District will pay \$1.2 million to use fluoridone, known by the brand name Sonar. The district has applied to both the state Department of Environmental Conservation and the Department of State for financial help.

Dean Long of the LA Group, the district's consultant on the project, is waiting for word from the state on the applications. Regardless of which grant the district receives, the board will rely largely on taxes gathered from district residents to pay for the herbicide and a professional to apply it to the lake.

Milfoil, an invasive nuisance weed that grows abundantly in the lake, has interfered with boat navigation. For 25 years, the improvement district has hired a three-person crew to pull out milfoil by hand using two harvester boats. The district has budgeted \$300,000 for milfoil removal in 2006.

In 2002, the district's board finished a watershed management plan that concluded herbicide was the best way to get rid of milfoil. The board must have a permit from DEC to do the work, an application process that requires an environmental impact statement.

Wilma Koss, president of the Saratoga Lake Association, a nonprofit advocacy organization, said SLA is "150 percent behind" the protection and improvement district's efforts.

"The biggest problem we have in the lake is milfoil," Koss said.

It tangles rower's blades and chokes the propellers of motor boats. Koss, a Saratoga Springs resident, said she has watched the problem worsen since she began using the lake in 1992. Last year, milfoil was accompanied by an algae bloom. The weed is one of the main reasons the association is opposed to the City Council using Saratoga Lake as a drinking water source. Even lowering the lake level a small amount allows more sun to reach the bottom and encourage milfoil growth, Koss said.

If the city moves forward with its plan to draw drinking water from the lake, the protection and improvement district's herbicide plan would be affected.

"Any chemical treatment will raise questions in that case," board member Joe Finn said.

In 2003, when the Lake George Association and others applied to the Adirondack Park Agency to use Sonar in Lake George, the state agency refused, in part because the lake is a drinking water source. Herbicide applications inside the Adirondack Park face more stringent standards, however. The APA has never granted a herbicide permit, but Sonar has been used widely statewide, including in Lake Erie, and nationwide.

Long is already allowing for the drinking water plan in the environmental impact statement. A drinking water intake pipe must be given a quarter-mile berth, Long said. The district is also considering a different herbicide to treat the shoreline along Route 9P. Long said a chemical that kills weeds on contact may be used instead of Sonar, which is absorbed by the plant and kills it entirely.

The draft environmental impact statement will be available in June or July, Long said. A public comment period will follow and the statement will be finalized by August.