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Published: May 2, 2006

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Lake groups seek to fight milfoil with chemicals

By Tom Mitchell, the Rutland Herald

Three groups that help manage local water bodies want to renew the use of chemicals to kill an invasive weed that has grown back in parts of those lakes and ponds in the past two years.

The renewed treatments would be applied to Lily Pond in Poultney and Little Lake in Wells — both connected to Lake St. Catherine — as well as parts of Lake Hortonia and Burr Pond, both in Sudbury.

"The treatments are (intended) to target dense ... regrowth of Eurasian water milfoil," said Susan Jary, an environmental scientist in the state's Department of Environmental Conservation.

Unable to stop a resurgence of the nuisance weeds with hand-pulling by divers, landowner groups on the three lakes have applied for permits to use Renovate, a spot herbicide that has never been used in Vermont, Jary said.

While milfoil hasn't reappeared on the main part of Lake St. Catherine, it has taken hold again in much of 20-acre Lily Pond.

"There were thousands of individual plants in Lily Pond (last summer)," Jary said.

The weeds also have re-infested a 10-acre section of Little Lake, connected to the south end of Lake St. Catherine.

In whole-lake treatments done in 2004, the chemical herbicide Sonar was applied in concentrations of up to 8 parts per billion.

Before the chemicals were introduced, the weeds were growing so thick they hampered boating, fishing and other recreational activities.

On the main portions of Lake St. Catherine and Lake Hortonia, results were considered successful because most of the milfoil was removed.

To zap the weeds again late this spring, the Lake St. Catherine Association has applied for a permit to add 115 gallons of the herbicide Renovate in concentrations of 1.5 parts per million in the weedy areas of Lily Pond.

The group also would apply 60 to 69 gallons in a northeast bay of Little Lake, in a concentration of 1.75 parts per million. Both of those would be done in early- to mid-June.

Weeds growing along the perimeter of Burr Pond and in four bays of Lake Hortonia would also receive spot treatments with Renovate.

Burr Pond would get 1.75 parts per million over 25 acres and Lake Hortonia would receive 1.75 parts per million over 23 acres, according to permit requests.

The DEC is awaiting comments from the state Health Department on any potential risk to human health, Jary said.

Comparing Renovate with Sonar is difficult because the herbicides have different active ingredients and are applied differently, said William Bress, state toxicologist in the Health Department.

Sonar, with an active ingredient of fluoridone, is applied at a much lower concentration initially but more must be added to keep its concentration at a minimum level for 60 days or more, Bress said.



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Used solely in an aquatic environment, on a lakewide basis, the systemic chemical kills targeted plants gradually, he said.

Renovate, with its key ingredient of triclopyr, is typically used in smaller areas and kills plants over a 48-hour period, Bress said. That herbicide is often used on land as well.

Renovate and Sonar are similar in their toxicity to living things, Bress said. Spot treatments are preferred to lakewide applications, he said.

There are risks to those who apply the chemicals. With direct contact, the herbicide can cause irreversible eye and is harmful if swallowed or absorbed through the skin, the label states.

Since the state issued a public notice outlining the proposed treatment plans, comments have been received from people opposed as well as those in favor.

"Some people don't like the use of chemicals under any circumstances," Jary said.

Any pesticide or herbicide pose a risk to species — native plants, for example — that are not intended to be killed, according to Paul Burns, executive director of Vermont Public Interest Research Group.

"They always carry a risk for nontarget species," he said.

The regulatory protections for the public stem from federal laws that prohibit any pesticide products from being advertised as safe, Burns said.

Besides applying for state permits to use the chemical, the landowner groups are seeking the state's help to pay for it. On Burr Pond and Lake Hortonia, for example, the treatments would cost \$23,000 to \$27,000 each.

So far, only one permit has been issued in Vermont for the aquatic use of Renovate, then known as Garlon 3A, on Lake Morey in 1993, Jary said. That project never went forward, due to opposition from residents of Fairlee.

The federal guidelines for using Renovate have become more strict since the last permit was issued for Lake Morey, Jary noted.