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A diver surfaces with a load of milfoil, removed by hand from Lake George's Huddle Bay on Sept. 2.

# Menace of the deep

Invasive species is  
hunted by divers in  
Lake George waters

By DAYELIN ROMAN



**BOLTON** ♦ Tommy Thomson rowed back and forth in his blue canoe under the warm late-summer sunshine.

But the yellow mesh bags in front of him signaled Thomson was doing more than enjoying an afternoon on Lake George's Huddle Bay.

"We'll work four 10-hour days during a week," he said. "Very rarely do we have any down time."

Thomson co-owns Aquatic Invasive Management, a company hired by the Fund for Lake George to yank up the invasive plant Eurasian watermilfoil from the bottom of Lake George.

So far, working since early September, the team of eight divers and the two company co-owners have removed more than 10 tons of the plant. The will continue working through the end of the month, earning \$75,000, paid for with a grant.

Milfoil grows only in shallow areas of fresh water, quickly forming dense mats on the surface that cut off sunlight to other plants and becoming a nuisance to swimmers, boaters and fishermen.

"Today, milfoil is the dominant plant on Lake George," said Peter Bauer, the executive director of the Fund for Lake George.

The milfoil will come back, Bauer said, despite the current



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**A diver removes Eurasian watermilfoil from the bottom of Lake George on Sept. 2.**

*"Milfoil can expand at a location rapidly. It can expand a thousand-fold in a year or two."*

**MICHAEL WHITE**

executive director of the Lake George Park Commission, on the detriment posed to Lake George by the presence of Eurasian watermilfoil

weeding. It is spread by boats that come from another body of water where milfoil is present or spreads from other sites in the lake itself.

But constantly controlling it, Bauer said, will keep it from taking over the lake.

Michael White, executive director of the Lake George

Park Commission, said milfoil is the bane of swimmers.

"Milfoil can expand at a location rapidly," he said. "It can expand a thousand-fold in a year or two."

The current project is the first time the hand-picking method has been used in areas of Lake George where mil-

foil is dense.

White said the commission has been fighting to get the invasive plant out of the lake since 1985, when milfoil was first identified in Lake George.

The commission now takes an annual inventory of the lake's milfoil and maps the 171 sites where it grows, indicating whether each site has been managed or needs more attention.

"Every year, we visit each site that has ever been identified with milfoil and check sites for regrowth," White said.

The park commission pays

*See MORE, Back Page*

# More than 200,000 plants to be removed

## ◆ MORE

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Lycott Environmental Inc. of Massachusetts to fight the plant using three different methods, but this year is the first time the Fund got involved, supplementing the commission's efforts.

"We certainly can use the help," White said.

Bauer said by the time Aquatic Invasive Management is done, more than 200,000 plants will have been pulled up.

Every morning, the team starts work by cordoning off an area with containment nets. Divers then swim in a line, each pulling up plants by the roots and stuffing them in mesh bags.

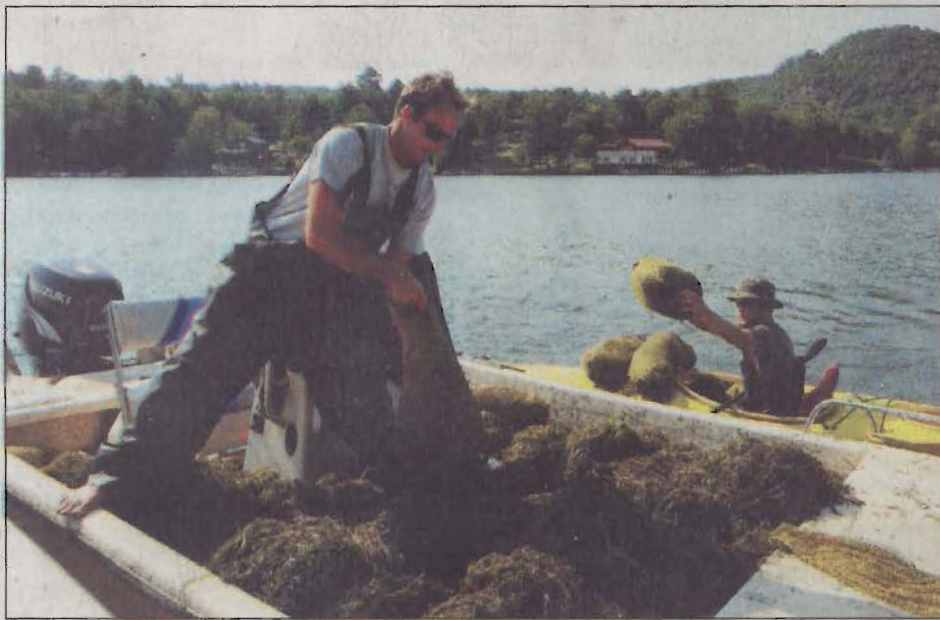
The bags, each of which holds about 30 pounds of plants, get handed to Thomson and co-owner Andrew Lewis, each of whom rows through the area in a kayak.

"Picture a cornfield and put it under water," Lewis said, describing what milfoil fields look like.

Divers breathe through a mechanism called an airline floating hookah ring. A lawn mower motor with a compressor sits on what looks like an inner tube with hoses coming out of it, each hose connected to a diver's mouth.

The mechanism is more efficient than scuba tanks, Thomson said, since it doesn't require constant changing of tanks.

White said the park commission uses the hand-harvesting method at sites where



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**Tommy Thomson, left, and Andrew Lewis, co-owners of A.I.M. (Aquatic Invasive Management), empty bags of Eurasian watermilfoil onto their boat after divers removed the plants by hand in Huddle Bay on Lake George on Sept. 2.**

*"We don't think we're ever going to be rid of milfoil on Lake George. What we hope to be able to do is get it down to a level where it's manageable."*

### PETER BAUER

executive director of the Fund for Lake George, on efforts taking place to remove Eurasian watermilfoil from Lake George

the milfoil is thin, and uses a method called Benthic barrier for dense sites.

Benthic barrier involves placing a large mat underwater over the milfoil, cutting off its sunlight and killing the

plants. The downside of the method, Bauer said, is that it kills all other plant life under the mats, too.

White said suction harvesting is used for moderate milfoil areas, using a vacuumlike

pump on a boat connected to a pipe that divers hold down on the milfoil to suck it up.

"It has good utility under certain circumstances," White said.

But Bauer said this summer's project has been useful in showing that dense beds of milfoil can be tackled by hand.

So far, crews have removed beds of the plant in Huddle Bay to the Green Island bridge and are working on Basin Bay.

"We don't think we're ever going to be rid of milfoil on Lake George," Bauer said. "What we hope to be able to do is get it down to a level where it's manageable."

## 2008 Site Status

KEY (see text for details)

- Cleared Sites (N=140)
- Controlled Sites (N=7)
- Sites Needing Future Effort (N=24)

2009 Lake George Milfoil sites from Post Star Article  
2009-10-9 Menace of the Deep

