The Post-Star

Editorial: Speed up chemical attacks on invasive plants

Posted: Friday, August 27, 2010 7:15 am

According to the Adirondack Park Invasive Plant program, there are 76 lakes and ponds in the Adirondack Park infested with some kind of invasive weed.

Of those 76 bodies of water that have been surveyed, 52 of them - or 68 percent - have been invaded by Eurasian milfoil. Others have been invaded by other non-native plants, including variable leaf milfoil, curlyleaf pondweed and water chestnut.

But of all those lakes and all those infestations, only one - Lake Luzerne - has been treated chemically.

The Adirondack Park Agency is celebrating the results of the first-ever use of the chemical triclopyr, which helped significantly reduce the amount of Eurasian milfoil that had clogged 15 acres of the southern end of Lake Luzerne.

But the agency is more than a decade behind in allowing this scientifically proven and environmentally safe solution to a problem that clogs lakes, makes swimming and boating impossible and harms native wildlife and plants by stripping the water of necessary oxygen and nutrients.

The question one has to ask is why this took so long to get approval? And when are they going to start allowing it to be used on other infested lakes in the park?

Comprehensive studies conducted a dozen years ago showed that the chemical almost exclusively attacks milfoil, having little impact on surrounding native plants. According to the National Pesticide Information Center, which is affiliated with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the chemical isn't cancerous, isn't harmful to birds, fish or humans, isn't easily absorbed through skin or by the body and breaks down into harmless organic elements, including carbon dioxide, within hours. In 2007, a state environmental report found risks from exposure to triclopyr in drinking water or recreational uses to be "negligible."

It's nice that the Adirondack Park Agency had such a positive experience in Lake Luzerne and has learned a lot about how to treat milfoil in other lakes, particularly putting up barriers to keep the chemical contained in the affected area. But this exact success story was being told more than a decade ago. This week's results should have come as no surprise.

The latest studies being conducted involve seeing if the chemical works at greater depths, where the sun can't break it down as easily, and in areas where currents dissipate the chemical before it can effectively attack plants.

In the meantime, the APA should use the Lake Luzerne experience, combined with years of successful treatment in other shallow lakes, to expedite future applications.

For too long, the APA has allowed dozens of lake areas in the Adirondacks to unnecessarily be overrun with invasive plants.

When you have years of evidence that something works on a significant problem and doesn't harm the environment, you don't let red tape stand in the way of a solution.

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