PostStar.com
Winner of the 2009 Pulitzer Prize

Killing nature to save it

12 HOURS AGO

The Adirondack Council's opposition to the town of Chester's plan to use a chemical herbicide to fight Eurasian milfoil in Loon Lake is a good example of the way environmentalists are tying themselves in knots over invasive species.

The environmental groups seem bewildered. The invasives are inarguably part of the natural world, engaging in natural processes. But they can be tremendously destructive of other species and wonderful natural features such as clear, beautiful Adirondack lakes.

So does a good environmentalist join the fight against invasives? And if so, what weapons are acceptable?

In Lake George, environmental groups have endorsed the heavy use of heavy mats (weighed down with rebar) to kill Asian clams. The mats kill other living things that get trapped underneath them, but that collateral damage has been acceptable to the environmental community.

It's not acceptable to the Adirondack Council, however, that Chester wants to use a chemical, triclopyr, that is targeted at certain sorts of plants, and which the existing science says kills only those plants.

The Council is saying that a snail, the banded mysterysnail, experienced a die-off in 2011 shortly after the chemical was used in Lake Luzerne.

The fascinating part of the argument is the banded mysterysnail appears not to be native to the area, but to have moved north into the area, perhaps as a result of global warming.

Does that make the banded mysterysnail an invasive species itself?

Climate change is causing lots of changes in the natural environment worldwide, including the movement of species into new areas. Is that a natural process? Or is it an unnatural process, since it is being caused by human-induced climate change?

For most local people, fighting the invasive species that foul waterways and make recreation difficult is an easy call. But it's tricky for environmentalists when they start having to choose among species, making value judgments and deciding which ones to target for killing.