



On Lake Arrowhead, two pontoon boats suction variable-leaf milfoil plants from the lake, part of the effort to control the growth of the invasive species. Here, Shannon Doyle, one of Lake Arrowhead's back-up boat captains, points to the water as Jim Robichaud, a diver, looks on. *Courtesy photo*

Summer milfoil war heats up

Lake associations continue to fight against the invasive plants.

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Lake associations across York County are intensifying the fight this summer against the ever-present threat of invasive aquatic plants.

At Lake Arrowhead, considered to be perhaps the worst-infested lake in Maine, daily efforts are under way to push back against the growth of variable-leaf milfoil, VLM, which has been present in the lake since the late 1990s.

Lake Arrowhead is one of 23 Maine lakes known to be infested with invasive aquatic plants. Most of the water bodies are infected with milfoil, an aggressive water plant native to the southern United States.

The plant, which can spread from one lake to another via a small fragment, forms dense mats that block sunlight from other species and degrades the habitat of native plants and animals. A thick mat of the plants can also render boating and other lake activities nearly impossible.

According to Mike Fitzpatrick, the president of the Lake Arrowhead Conservation Council, "The situation is slowly improving year to year as a result of the council's efforts."

Nevertheless, he said, the lake has "a significant infestation that would grow to the point of making the lake useless for recreational activities unless [the council] continues to fight this invasive plant."

The efforts are a daily undertaking. The council runs two pontoon boat harvesters to carry out diver-assisted suction harvesting, or DASH, which sucks up the plants. Benthic barriers help cut milfoil growth in shallow areas where the boats can't reach. The barriers are light-blocking mats that are laid over the milfoil plants to prevent photosynthesis from occurring, which causes them to die.

Like other lakes across the state, Lake Arrowhead is also home to a courtesy boat inspection program. Seven days a week, the program provides a trained inspector who looks over boats leaving the lake to ensure they are not taking any milfoil with them, and inspects boats entering Arrowhead to ensure that no other invasive plants enter the water.

John McPhedran, who works in the

Invasive Aquatic Species Program at the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, says that the boat monitoring programs across the state are part of the reason Maine has managed to keep its infestation rate relatively low, compared to other New England states.

Maine "has a really good inspection program," McPhedran said, pointing out that there were 76,000 inspections in 2011. In addition, Maine has a good early detection rate, led by courtesy boat inspection workers and volunteers who remove suspicious plants from boats and send them to be tested.

Just recently, the careful work of an inspector prevented the invasive water chestnut from entering Mousam Lake. According to the Shapleigh town newsletter, the plant is believed to have come from the Charles River in Boston, where the boat had been taken previously. While the invasives that have entered Maine lakes can never be entirely eradicated, McPhedran said, such incidents show how Maine has seen success in combating the menace.

The work of the lake associations in fighting back against the invasive

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Money, vigilance needed in milfoil fight

"Milfoil" from page 1

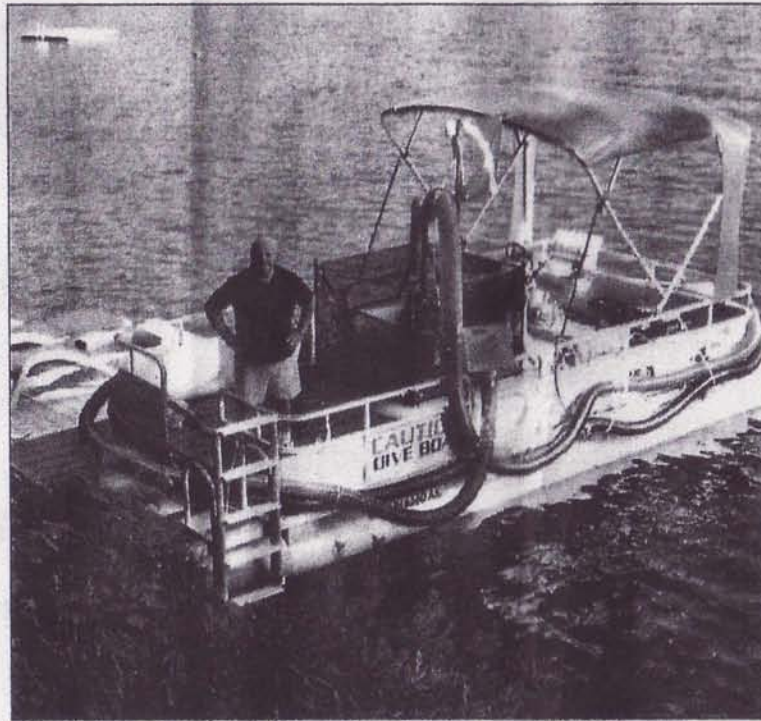
plants has been "tremendous," McPhedran said. While the groups provide much of the manpower, and "are really making it happen on the ground and in the water," the state assists them and organizes grant funding and removal permits.

The state also runs rapid response to new infestations, including in Pickerel Pond in Limerick, where hydrilla was found in 2002 and has since been cut back with regular herbicide treatments.

This year, the early ice out and a lot of rain has brought in nutrients and led to "prolific plant growth," McPhedran said, who added that 2012 has been declared the year of boater self-inspection, in an effort to move from awareness to action.

"The threat will not go away," McPhedran said, and it's important that boaters inspect their watercraft even when the courtesy boat inspectors are not on the lake.

In Balch Lake, an inspection program is part of the efforts organized by the lake's improvement committee, which was formed by property owners after the lake became infested with variable-leaf milfoil in 2001.



Lee Willson, the president of the Balch Lake Improvement Committee, stands in a diver-assisted suction harvesting boat, which is used to suction milfoil plants from the lake. *Courtesy photo*

On the New Hampshire side of the lake, an herbicide is used annually over 25-75 acres, with some success, according to Lee Willson, president of the lake improvement association.

The Maine side of the lake hasn't been treated with the chemicals. As McPhedran ex-

plained, the DEP examines each case individually, and moves to use herbicide if it feels it is necessary to combat the infestation.

Balch Lake, which borders Acton, Newfield and Shapleigh in Maine and Wakefield in New Hampshire, also has a DASH boat that goes out three days a

week to suction up the plants. So far this year, the boat has pulled up 20,000 pounds of milfoil. The lake, Willson said, is relatively shallow, providing "an ideal place for it to flourish."

"This will always be an ongoing problem. We can control it but we can't eradicate it," Willson said.

The efforts to control the invasive are not cheap, and Willson said the improvement committee is hoping the towns on the Maine side will begin contributing to the effort next year. The committee has spent \$40,000 on refurbishing the DASH boat, and spends \$15,000-\$20,000 annually on the herbicide treatment. Much of the money comes from donations, fundraisers and contributions from property owners along the lake, and the town of Wakefield on the New Hampshire side has put funding in its budget for the effort.

Willson hopes that Acton and Newfield will provide funds in 2013. The danger for the towns, he said, is that property values can take a hit when the lake becomes more difficult to use because of the infestation.

Lorraine Yeaton, the secretary for Acton's selectmen, agreed that the health of the lake could affect the health of the town's

budget. Because Acton relies on lake property taxes for its budget, "if the lakes have a problem, then we've got a problem."

Yeaton said that the improvement committee asked for support too late in the budget season this year, but added that if they come back next year to ask for funds, "the town would have no problem including them."

Lake Arrowhead also relies on contributions from property owners and fundraisers to combat its infestation. The conservation council has received grants and funds from Limerick and Waterboro, which each contributed \$3,000 annually until this year, when Limerick chose not to include the item in its budget, Fitzpatrick said.

"There is not adequate funding considering the level of infestation we have," Fitzpatrick said.

Part of the problem, he added, is that "the lakes and ponds in Maine belong to the people of Maine, until there's a problem. Then they belong to the lake associations."

Fitzpatrick and Willson agreed that the fight against invasive plants requires a steadfast effort.

"It's going to take constant vigilance on our part with a certain amount of money each year," Willson said.