
Harvesting Operation Takes Over 1,200 Tons of Weeds from the Apple River

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This was our first full season of operations since delivery of our equipment last August. Due to the unusually cold and wet spring weather, we started our harvesting operations on May 28th, about two weeks later than originally scheduled.

The main target early in the season is Curly-leaf Pondweed, an invasive species which grows under the ice during the winter and starts to emerge shortly after ice-out. This plant is responsible for the large dense areas of vegetation seen on the Flowage in late May and June. Since it is an invasive species, we are allowed to aggressively harvest it and we try to put out an all-out effort to get as much of it removed as possible before it starts to die back in July. As the Curly-leaf starts dropping, Coontail starts taking over the waterway. Although Coontail doesn't have roots like Curly-leaf, it will attach itself to whatever it can find, including the existing beds of Curly-leaf. Frequently the Coontail will form big sections of floating mats that work their way downstream along the main channels, frustrating boaters and anglers. Also in July the Duckweed starts blooming and adds to the problem. Duckweed is a tiny light green plant the size of large pin heads that grows by the millions in calm water areas such as bays and ponds. One good feature of the Duckweed is that they cling to the floating Coontail mats, making them easier to spot and capture by the harvester operator.

Our strategy this season was to remove as much of the Curly leaf Pondweed as possible early, then systematically move up and down the Flowage keeping the main navigation channel clear plus providing access channels to the residents along the shoreline whenever practical. In addition to the navigation and access channels, we also provide harvesting for designated recreational areas along the Flowage. Examples are; the small bay by North Park, the bay near the Lincoln Landing, and the side bays on the West shoreline in Amery. It is important to note that we operate under the strict rules of a permit authorized by the Department of Natural Resources and have clear guidance and restrictions as to what we can and cannot do.

We had a relatively uneventful season, maintenance wise, with the equipment. We worked our way through minor breakdowns, usually getting the machine back on the water quickly thanks to the mechanical skills of Dave Schleusner, and only had one down day waiting for parts from the manufacturer. The bulk of the harvesting was done by three operators, Wayne Jones, David Schleusner, and Gary Utecht. If you like the results you've seen on the river this year, shake their hands and let them know how much we all appreciate their efforts.

As we neared the end of August, it became apparent that the Coontail had stopped growing (about two weeks earlier than normal) and was rapidly disappearing from the main and access channels. We stopped operations on August 29th and are currently performing maintenance on the equipment and getting it ready for winter storage.



While we don't have any quotas or specific tonnage goals, everyone is always interested the volume of aquatic vegetation removed from the Flowage. This year we harvested a total of 566 loads of weeds, measuring approximately 155,650 cubic feet in volume, and weighing approximately 2,535,680 pounds. Due to its high nutrient content, the harvested weeds make excellent fertilizer and are put to good use by local growers like Dragonfly Nursery and other organic farmers in the area.

The plan for next year is basically more of the same. We'll be on the water as soon as conditions permit next May attacking the Curly-leaf once again.