

Trying to Put Milfoil Down for the Count

Jamie Munks

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Officials are hopeful a three-year push to remove milfoil from Lake George can bring the invasive plant's presence to a level that requires only routine maintenance moving forward.

The Lake George Park Commission has for years been coordinating an annual milfoil removal program, which is supplemented by funding and labor from the environmental group the Fund for Lake George.

"We feel we need a two- or three-year plan to really hit milfoil and knock it back," Lake George Waterkeeper Chris Navitsky said.

At a recent meeting of the Lake George Park Commission's invasive species committee, the commission's Executive Director Dave Wick said officials are hoping to secure about \$250,000 to devote to milfoil removal this year.

Officials hope in the second and third years they can begin to scale back effort and eventually get to a point where divers are doing swim-overs with a smaller crew, enabling a reduction in time and money spent.

Navitsky estimated that in 2013, about \$150,000 was put toward milfoil removal, between contributions from the Fund for Lake George and the Lake George Park Commission. Some of the dense areas of milfoil growth were hit last year — Huddle Bay in Bolton, the village of Lake George, and Sandy, Warner and Dunham's bays, Navitsky said.

Increased funding this year and a concentrated although gradually scaled-back effort the next two years could be the push the program needs to get milfoil down to a maintenance level, which in the long run, is expected to save money.

"This may be one of our best years in a while," Wick said.

The invasive Eurasian watermilfoil, which competes with and can displace native aquatic plants, has been present and managed in Lake George for close to three decades.

The 2012 milfoil removal report indicates the program has brought 80% of the milfoil in Lake George under control, and that a major push toward a maintenance level could bring that to more than 95% under control.

Milfoil is expected to persist at some sites in the lake because of location and habitat, but the goal is to get even those sites to a point where no significant spread of the invasive species is taking place, the report says.



Eurasian water milfoil, curly-leaf pondweed and zebra mussels are all currently known to be in Lake George, but invasive species removal efforts are ongoing in Lake George to prevent the additional spread of these and other species throughout the basin. (Courtesy image - Invasive.org)

"We feel it's always going to be present because of the nature of it," Navitsky said. "But we'd like to get it to a low maintenance level."

Since milfoil was first discovered in lake George in 1985, roughly 200 locations where it is growing in the lake have been found, although some of those have been clear for years and have been removed from the list of sites.

Roughly half of the sites are located in the lake's southern basin, near population centers and areas that boats frequent, according to a 2012 report.

In 2012, Lycott Environmental Inc., the firm the Lake George Park Commission has contracted with, removed 147,813 plants from the lake, logging 880 hours. The Fund for Lake George that year removed another 88,000 plants, logging 360 diver hours, according to the 2012 report.

Each of the known milfoil sites is annually checked and recorded, and over the years the invasive plant has been managed using hand-harvesting, benthic barriers and suction harvesting for some of the heaviest and most massive milfoil beds.

It would be beneficial to get divers into some of the problem areas earlier in the year, although that has proved difficult in the village of Lake George, where removal efforts have often taken place later in the season, Navitsky said.

"The problem with the village is it's hard to get in until later because of the tourism activity and boat traffic," Navitsky said. "If we could get in around the village sometime in June, we could try to knock it back and hit it again later."