

MEMORANDUM
Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District

To: Board of Managers

Date: June 20, 2019

From: Mike Kinney

Subject: Eurasian Watermilfoil Treatment Methodology

Background/Discussion

During the 2019 budgeting process, it was decided that the District would not budget for Eurasian watermilfoil (EWM) treatments in 2019. There was discussion among the managers that the District could provide guidance to local lake associations and residents regarding best practices for treating EWM. Staff researched this topic and recommends the following points.

First, the District staff are always available to assist lake associations, their members and citizens in general in understanding the ecology and regulations regarding EWM in any District lake. As a part of that service, District staff rely in general on the MN Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for most guidance on aquatic plant management (invasive or otherwise). As such, staff readily shares that same information with residents and helps in explaining various elements as needed. The DNR has regulated such activities for many years and utilizes full time professional staff to review proposed treatments (oftentimes performing field reviews) and issue permits. As such, the District may want to continue to reach out to local lake residents and lake associations to increase knowledge and awareness of the various regulations associated with managing aquatic plants. For example, any time chemicals are used to treat aquatic plants (invasive or otherwise), a permit is required.

Staff recommends that the first step in properly treating EWM is to ensure the necessary permits are obtained if appropriate. By working with the DNR's regulatory program, staff predict that many improper treatment techniques will be avoided, because the DNR will review and decide whether they are appropriate. For example, if a group or organization is proposing something that would cause too much damage to native plants, DNR would make the call to stop that activity. DNR has our lakes' ecological integrity and native plant populations' best interests in mind.

Beyond conforming to regulations, homeowners may wish to use some other best practices to ensure optimal long-term management of EWM. One such best practice is alternating the type of herbicide being used every 3-4 years in order to prevent developing resistant strains. There are many types of herbicide available to treat EWM. Two common types, as identified by their active ingredient, include 2,4-D and triclopyr. There are a variety of brand names that utilize each active ingredient. Some, such as Navigate and Alligare for example, only use 2,4-D. Some, such as Renovate for example, only use triclopyr. If treated for many years in a row with the same active ingredient, EWM may develop a resistance to the herbicide. Many herbicide applicators recommend alternating between 2,3-D and triclopyr roughly every 3-4 years to prevent developing resistance. For more details on this, residents are encouraged to reach out to the DNR and herbicide application professionals.

If organizations are considering mechanical removal methods, as opposed to chemical control, staff recommends that they make certain to carefully collect as many EWM fragments as possible. EWM in particular tends to propagate from fragments and spread throughout the lake. If using mechanical control methods, such as hand pulling or using a harvesting machine, extra care should be taken to collect and dispose of any severed EWM fragments.

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Finally, staff recommends that, in cases of large-scale management strategies, homeowners are encouraged to work with licensed professionals. Some herbicide applicator professionals recommend that homeowners are perfectly capable of performing do-it-yourself treatments for small-scale situations (e.g. treating aquatic plants along 50% of their own shoreline area). In these cases, homeowners still need to get a permit and follow the herbicide product label instructions. As treatments start to increase in size and scope, utilizing a trained and licensed professional may become more and more necessary. For larger treatments, licensed applicators may be better equipped to properly identify the target plant and use proper dosing methods.

In summary, staff recommends that the following best practices when it comes to EWM management:

1. **Know the rules and get a permit.** DNR's professional staff are charged with protecting our lakes, while keeping in mind that there is a reasonable level of plant management that can occur.
2. **Consider methods to prevent developing herbicide-resistant strains when using chemical control techniques.** Alternative type of herbicide every 3-4 years or so and consult with DNR and herbicide applicator professionals on the matter.
3. **Take care to prevent spread of fragments when using mechanical control techniques.**
4. **Consider hiring a professional to implement your treatment.** Small-scale applications, such as single shorelines, may oftentimes be appropriate for a do-it-yourself treatment, but larger scale operations may be better suited for a licensed professional.

Aquatic plant management is a complex topic with many details to consider. The District can be a resource for local residents and homeowner organizations to turn to. While District staff may not be able to answer every question there is on the matter, we can usually direct people to the right sources of information. District staff will continue to maintain relationships with local lake associations and provide resources to help residents protect and improve their lakes.

No action is recommended for this agenda item, unless the Board wishes to give staff some specific direction on this matter.