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Grants target invasive species

{ "CC Byline"/ } Staff Report

{ "CC Body Text"/ } The Otsego County Conservation Association has received a \$15,600 grant from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation for a project to organize and conduct a three-year program for the eradication of the water chestnut (*Trapa natans*) on Goodyear Lake.

The program, which will use manual eradication methods rather than herbicides, will begin next August and end in July 2010.

"We want to get this damaging invasive species eradicated from Goodyear Lake and we want to avoid the use of toxic substances to do this. The grant from DEC will make this possible, so, of course, we're very pleased about it," said Erik Miller, the organization's executive director.

If water chestnuts remain unchecked, they form dense, nearly impenetrable mats, threatening ecosystems and making swimming, fishing, boating, hunting and outdoor activities virtually impossible. Also, the plant's sharply spined fruit is capable of penetrating shoe leather and can wash ashore, thus posing an injury hazard.

"Eradicating the water chestnut will restore oxygen levels, thus improving the ecological conditions of the lake for wildlife habitat both in and near the water. Improving these conditions is acquiring more urgency due to the U.S. EPA's intention to regulate total maximum daily loads (TMDLs) in New York State as of 2011 to protect the Chesapeake Bay," the association's application stated.

A three-pronged method of education, physical removal, and community monitoring will be enacted to eliminate the presence of the plant. Informational material to identify and explain the threats posed by water chestnuts will be designed and distributed to residents around Goodyear Lake, as well as to other users of the lake. Signage will also be created and posted in critical locations near the lake.

Past eradication efforts have been hindered by a shortage of equipment. The grant will enable the purchase of a johnboat and six 17-ft. canoes.

"We will now be able to accommodate the many volunteers who would have helped in the past but had no boat to use," Miller said.

According to Timothy Sinnott of the DEC, OCCA's was the highest scoring grant application for this grant program.

"This is the kind of project we want to see," Sinnott said.

Following the discovery of the water chestnut in Goodyear Lake in 2006, the Goodyear Lake Association organized an initial hand-pulling eradication effort, followed by three similar efforts in partnership with the OCCA. "For the past three years we've tried to tackle the situation," said Bruce Shultis of the Goodyear Lake Association. "This grant will certainly help us along and get more involvement from members of the association and of the lake area, as well."

Another local grant recipient is the SUNY Research Foundation.

The foundation will receive \$28,139 to eradicate 40 acres of purple loosestrife and water chestnut from a wetland near Oneonta.

As the water chestnuts take over a water body, they form a dense mat of floating vegetation that chokes out native plants. Because the plant can get so thick, it has been known to clog pipes, canals and waterways, affecting navigation and power plant infrastructure.

Purple loosestrife is an aquatic weed introduced from Europe that can out-compete native vegetation.

More than 30 municipalities and organizations across the state will receive a total of \$1.4 million to help wipe out infestations of non-native aquatic species across the state.

The Aquatic Invasive Species Eradication grants will be used by recipients to help fight zebra mussels, water chestnuts, round goby, Eurasian watermilfoil, purple loosestrife, and phragmites, and other invasive threats to New York's ecosystems.

"Aquatic invasive species, particularly plants, have a wide range of environmental, recreational and economic impacts _ they spread rapidly, congest water ways, and disrupt native fish populations," State Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Pete Grannis said.

"Once infested by invasives, lakes and rivers can become unusable, and the negative impacts on boating, fishing and swimming can adversely affect local economies that are dependant on these waterbodies," he continued.