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## Invasive Weed Hits Lake In Whitefish

### FLATHEAD COUNTY

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**KALISPELL, Mont.** -- In the Flathead, folks pay a lot of attention to noisy predators like bears and wolves, but there can also be quiet dangers that lurk beneath the Valley's waters.

Invasive plants can wreak havoc on Montana's ecosystems, and the latest battle is being waged at Beaver Lake in Whitefish. County officials closed the lake down to yank out a patch of Eurasian Water Milfoil.

"When it grows, it grows all the way to the surface and then canopies," said Flathead Basin AIS Work Group Member Erik Hanson. "It shades all the other plants, so what you end up with is only Eurasian Water Milfoil, and it grows so thick the fish can't use it."

Officials say the invasion might have started about three years ago. The plant hasn't spread throughout the lake, and it's mostly concentrated at an area right next to a boat launch.

The plant's effects reach well beyond hurting fish. Hanson says nearby property values can drop as much as 15 percent in the wake of an invasion.

"We need to be sure that we can recreate on our waters and we're not going to lose that value," said Hanson. "It can be a big issue. There have been instances where this has become so thick that people have drowned in it."

Fall can be an especially bad time for the plant, because it can become brittle, break off and spread. Flathead authorities aren't taking any chances. The crew decided to install a series of barriers over the plants, and the boat launch will be closed for the rest of the season.

Hanson said this won't be the end of the containment efforts.

"We need to make sure that anybody that comes to the Flathead basin has a clean boat," said Hanson. "That's why we need highway inspection stations to make sure that boaters bring clean boats to the Flathead."

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