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Invasive aquatic species found in Beaver Lake

Whitefish Lake Institute

The Flathead Aquatic Invasive Species Working Group announced the discovery of Eurasian Watermilfoil—an aquatic invasive weed—at Beaver Lake. The small lake is located 6 1/2 miles northwest of Whitefish.

After a lengthy lake survey by Erik Hanson, Flathead Basin AIS consultant, and Josh Gubits from the Whitefish Lake Institute, and positive identification by aquatic invasive species specialists, it was concluded that the lake boat ramp will be closed until there is no longer a risk of spreading the weed.

The plants — covering about a 12-by-12 foot area in the lake — were found by Department of Natural Resources and Conservation personnel during a field trip last Wednesday. The identification of the plants was confirmed by Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks and the Montana Department of Agriculture.

Eurasian Watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) was introduced to North America from Europe and Asia, and is found over much of the United States.

“The introduction of Eurasian Watermilfoil can drastically alter the ecology of a water body,” notes Erik



Eurasian Watermilfoil was found recently in Beaver Lake near Whitefish.

Hanson. “It forms dense mats of vegetation on the surface of the water, interfering with recreational activities such as fishing, swimming, and boating. Because its spring growth starts earlier than most native plants, it can stop sunlight from reaching native plants, causing the decline of native species.”

Eurasian Watermilfoil reproduces successfully and very rapidly, making it a threat to any water body it invades. In the fall and late summer, the plant becomes brittle and breaks into fragments, which float across lakes, sinking and starting new plants. Plant pieces are easily transported between water bodies by boats and fishing gear

According to John Fraley of Montana FWP, “The boat

ramp on Beaver Lake has been closed in an effort to protect a spread of the weed on Beaver Lake and to other Northwest Montana Lakes. The closure will remain in effect until the threat of spreading has passed.”

Flathead County Superintendent Jed Fisher explained that a professional weed extractor will be working to remove and dispose of the plants from the lake this week. The Flathead Aquatic Invasive Species Workgroup will be meeting this week to discuss eradication strategies to employ this fall and next spring.

The Whitefish Lake Institute has not found any evidence of Eurasian Watermilfoil in Whitefish Lake during routine surveys and after an extensive survey late last week.

“We’re concerned about the proximity of the Beaver Lake Eurasian Watermilfoil infestation to Whitefish Lake. All boat owners need to become familiar with this issue to prevent the spread of this weed,” explained Lori Curtis, Science and Education Director at the institute.

The mission of the Flathead Basin AIS Work Group is to work locally to help prevent the introduction of aquatic invasive species into the Flathead Basin, and to help contain, control and, where possible, eradicate the aquatic invasive species present in the Flathead Basin. Members include: City of Polson, Clark Fork Coalition, Clearwater Resource Council, Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, Flathead Basin Commission, Flathead Conservation District, Flathead County, Flathead County Weed District, Flathead Lakers, Flathead Lake Biological Station, Glacier National Park, Lake County, Missoula County/Missoula County Weed District, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Montana Department of Agriculture, Salish Kootenai College, Sanders County, Swan Lakers, US Fish & Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, US Geological Survey, Whitefish Lake Institute, and select Flathead County legislators.