

Water WoRDs

Updates from the Water Resources Division



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Nuisance Plants, Algae and Swimmer's Itch - Oh My!

It's officially summer and with rising temperatures many Michiganders and tourists will head out to a lake to cool off, recreate and relax. Fortunately, with four Great Lakes and more than 11,000 inland lakes they won't necessarily have to travel far to find one of Michigan's beautiful waterbodies to enjoy. This is also the time of year that the WRD's Aquatic Nuisance Control Program receives frequent calls regarding swimmer's itch rashes and nuisance weeds and algae that can be unsightly and may prohibit recreational uses of the lake.

Aquatic plants and algae play an essential role in aquatic systems by providing food and habitat for wildlife, species diversity, stabilization of sediments, and improved water quality. However, too much of a good thing can from time to time be considered a nuisance. Rapid growth of plants and/or algae will create nuisance conditions by producing dense monocultures of vegetation that can be unsightly, interfere with lake uses, and may negatively alter natural qualities such as species diversity and fish community structure. There's no mystery as to why nuisance plants and algae occur. Many lakes located in highly developed watersheds suffer from accelerated eutrophication caused by excessive nutrient loading. Nutrients and/or sediments from agricultural areas, fertilized lawns, and failing septic systems move from the land and enter aquatic systems. Those additional nutrients provide ideal growing conditions for aquatic weeds and algae, sometimes resulting in an overabundance of aquatic vegetation. Nuisance conditions also arise when non-native organisms are introduced. Invasive plants and algae infestations are found in waterbodies all over the state, regardless of the influence of development. Invasive plants and algae create nuisance conditions because they are capable of displacing native plants and algae thus resulting in dense monocultures of weeds that have low ecological value and can inhibit recreation uses of the infested waterbody.



Boat applying treatment



A plant rake demonstrating excessive plant growth

What do you do in the WRD?

Meet the Aquatic Nuisance Control Staff

The Aquatic Nuisance Control (ANC) Program is responsible for administering the permits issued for pesticide application to waters of the state for control of nuisance weeds, algae and/or swimmers itch. ANC Permits are required by and issued under Part 31, Water Resources Protection of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act 1994 PA 451, as amended (NREPA), and Part 33, Aquatic Nuisance Control, of the NREPA.

Over the course of roughly four very busy months in the winter and spring, six of our WRD colleagues will issue over 2500 permits authorizing the application of chemicals to waters of the state to control various aquatic nuisances including algae, aquatic plants, and swimmer's itch. Permit applications are reviewed to assess environmental impact to the waterbody proposed for treatment, and any human health and safety issues. Chemical applications that are permitted may begin as early as April, and may continue through late summer and early fall for phragmites control projects.

The ANC staff is responsible for all aspects of the program for the entire state. In the field, ANC staff survey waterbodies to determine the composition of the plant community and whether any exotic plant species are present, conduct compliance and enforcement investigations, monitor efficacy and selectivity of treatments for whole lake management of non-native watermilfoil, and educate stakeholders about the importance of diverse plant communities and options for control and management of nuisance conditions.

In the office, besides reviewing permit applications for a decision, the ANC staff reviews new chemical products proposed for use in Michigan's waters, address phone calls from concerned citizens who have questions about chemical control, and collaborate on emerging scientific and management issues in non-native aquatic plant management.

As our fellow Michiganders head out across the state to the lakes for summer vacation, this small group of dedicated WRD staff remain ready and willing to discuss any questions and concerns citizens may have related to aquatic nuisances including: plants, algae and swimmer's itch.

For more information please visit the ANC website: www.michigan.gov/anc



Starry stonewort, an aquatic nuisance, in a Michigan lake



ANC Staff: Rachel Matthews, Amanda Whitscell, Eric Bacon, and Pam Studebaker. Not pictured, Doyle Brunsen