

# MOOSEHEAD MATTERS



QUILT RAFFLE! PAGE 8

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## Volunteers looking to keep Moosehead milfoil-free

By JONATHAN PRATT

MOOSEHEAD LAKE—As part of a statewide effort to keep Maine waterways clear of invasive aquatic plants, members of the Volunteer Lake Monitoring Program have been in the Moosehead region over the past few weeks. While here, they have been collecting data on native species, as well as being on the lookout for any non-native aquatic plants that may have found their way to Maine's largest lake. Thus far, nothing invasive has been found, but it will take vigilance on everyone's part to insure the landscape of Moosehead remains that way.

Moosehead Lake has never been the subject of such an inventory before now, so all native plants have not necessarily been identified. As of Thursday of last week, volunteers had even found four native milfoil species. As Roberta Hill, aquatic ecologist and environmental educator for the Maine Center for Invasive Aquatic Plants, puts it, "that's news!"

She also went on to mention many locals who proved to be most helpful in the group's arrival and stay in the area. "We have been met with such support from so many local people in the area," she remarked.

The Maine Volunteer Lake Monitoring Program (MVLMP) was formed in 1971, and is one of the nation's oldest citizen-driven lake monitoring groups. The focus of the MVLMP has been water quality, as well as the introduction of non-indigenous invasive aquatic plants since their inception. Dr. Keith Williams, an Aquatic Botanist from Windham, signed on for the Moosehead assignment because he wanted to see another part of the state, "I have been in Canada for a while, and I would say that Moosehead reminds me more of the lakes I have surveyed in Canada, more than those I have seen in Southern Maine."

Volunteer, and "President of the Brotherhood of Galley Slaves" (so named for his rowing, and direction-taking, duties), Robert French commented, "I have seen plants in Southern Maine that I haven't seen here."

French, along with his wife Sibyl, are self-described "novices" although they have been monitoring Panther Pond for two years. The couple, who split time between Massachusetts and Raymond, are teammates of fellow volunteers Bunny and Ross Westcott, also of Raymond. The Westcotts spent significant time surveying Moosehead along with the rest of the group of volunteers.

Another volunteer, Ellen Hanger, recalled her time at Lake Champlain in Vermont, which has been infested with invasive aquatic plants over time. In particular, the indigenous water chestnut.

Water chestnut is one of Maine's 11 banned invasive aquatic plants. The other ten are Brazilian elodea, Curly-leaved pondweed, Eurasian water milfoil, European frogbit, European naiad, Fanwort, Hydrilla, Parrot feather variable-leaf water milfoil and yellow floating heart. Three of those banned plants, the Curly-leaved pondweed, Eurasian water milfoil and Hydrilla, have been documented in Maine.

Invasive aquatic plants may have devastating impacts on habitat, loss of native plant and animal communities, reduced property values, impaired fishing and degraded recreational experiences, as well as increasing control costs. Those costs certainly never decrease, though funding sources for efforts to rid Maine lakes of invasive species remain more constant. Meaning the potential for future work and projects to possibly be downsized, or even curbed, in the name of budgetary concerns and constraints.

Funding for the Maine Center for Invasive Aquatic Plants (MCIAP), which was established by the MVLMP in 2003, is received from a funding mechanism created by the Maine State Legislature, the Betterment Fund, Memorials and Planned Giving and Bequests.

One mechanism for funding is the invasive sticker program. Every boat registration in Maine is required to include a milfoil sticker. Funding from the sticker program is broken up as such: Inspections-30 percent, Plant Control-29 percent, Education-22 percent, Monitoring-18 percent and Interstate Efforts-one percent.

The basic function of these wandering volunteers is to scan coves and inlets throughout Maine lakes. They use a few variations of a "scope", one of

which is a homemade version designed by Ross Westcott. He took a plastic tub of sorts, cut out the bottom and placed plexiglass there, and off he went surveying waterways with ease.

A major deterrent to the introduction of these invasive aquatic plants has been courtesy boat inspections, wherein boaters stop and trained volunteers literally inspect their boats, trailers and gear for any plants. These boat inspections are typically performed near entryways and boat ramps near Maine's lakes and waterways.

Aside from these inspections, other preventative measures include draining water from boat motors, live wells, bilges and transom wells on dry land. Experts also advise emptying your bait bucket on land (note: never release live bait into any body of water).

It is also recommended that boaters adhere to the following instructions after leaving the lake, or other body of water: wash the equipment with hot water and soap, or spray the boat and equipment with high pressure water, wipe the boat and equipment, and dry the boat for at least 48 hours before transporting the boat to any other body of water. It is known that some species can survive for several days, and some for several weeks, out of water.

The most successful measure thus far has proven to be the volunteer lake monitors. It's been countless hours these protectors of Maine waterways have put into the project that has led to many of the group's endeavors. As Hill said, "Almost all species have been found by alert, informed citizens and volunteers."

According to the "Maine Field Guide to Invasive Aquatic Plants", If you think you have found an invasive plant, mark the location of the plant with a weighted buoy and carefully collect the specimen for species confirmation. Place the specimen in a sealed container of water and store in a cool place. Alert the Maine Center for Invasive Aquatic Plants (207-783-7733 or [mciap@mainevlmp.org](mailto:mciap@mainevlmp.org)) immediately. You will be given directions for shipping the specimen. Please do not attempt to remove the entire plant.

The State of Maine Department of Environmental Protection has taken the threat of invasive plants seriously, too. There are penalties for transporting any plant (up to \$500), as well as fines for transporting fish (up to \$10,000) and failure to affix current Lake and River Protection Fund Sticker to motorized craft (\$250). If you suspect, or detect, a violation, call 1-800-452-4664.