



Press Release: For Immediate Release

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Date: May 7, 2009

Photos and publication samples: Available upon request

Volunteer Invasive Plant Patrollers “Jump-Start” Monitoring Effort on Moosehead Lake

If an aquatic invader such as Eurasian milfoil were to find its way into Moosehead Lake, is it likely that somebody would find the intruder BEFORE it became irreversibly established there?

In 2008, the Maine Volunteer Lake Monitoring Program (VLMP) launched an ambitious pilot initiative on Moosehead Lake to help ensure that the answer to this question is an emphatic “Yes!” Year two of the initiative is now underway. In the short term, the goal of the pilot initiative, called Invasive Plant Patrol “Jump-Start,” is to organize and conduct a screening survey of all shallow, off-shore areas of the lake, to rule out the presence of harmful aquatic invaders. Ultimately, however, the goal is to create an ongoing, locally-sustainable, citizen-based monitoring program capable of detecting problem species as soon as possible after introduction, *before* they grow out of control.

The Maine Volunteer Lake Monitoring Program (VLMP), founded in 1971, is the oldest, and one of the largest, citizen-based lake monitoring programs in the nation. Since the inception of the VLMP’s Invasive Plant Patrol (IPP) program in 2001, nearly 2000 individuals have been trained to monitor Maine waters for the presence of aquatic invaders. Roberta Hill, Program Director of VLMP’s Center for Invasive Aquatic Plants, puts it this way, “We provide volunteers with everything they need to participate in an annual statewide search for something that we all hope will never be found. And the good news is, we are making great progress!”

Roughly 2/3 of all invasive aquatic species monitoring currently taking place in the state is now done by trained volunteers. “Despite this progress,” Hill cautions, “significant gaps in Maine’s early detection system remain. “Survey activity on some of Maine’s most exceptional lakes, for example, remains sparse to non-existent.”

The VLMP developed IPP Jump-Start to address this gap, and they have taken a novel approach. The core of the program is the annual formation and coordination of the IPP Jump-Start team, comprised of novice patrollers and other members of the target community who will work and learn directly along side of VLMP staff, seasoned IPP volunteers, state agency personnel, and other professionals. During a weeklong survey “blitz,” the team conducts an invasive aquatic plant screening survey as well as a baseline native aquatic plant inventory on the waters of concern. While they are based in the area, team members engage in one-on-one educational outreach, informational meetings, local events, communication with community leaders and the local press, etc. to raise awareness of the project, and more broadly, the threat of invasive aquatic species in Maine. IPP training is offered to local community members, and workshop attendees are invited to test out their new skills by participating in one or more days of the survey.

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The VLMP kicked off the Moosehead Jump-Start pilot initiative last summer, with a major grant from The Betterment Fund. Just last week, the Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund Board voted unanimously to provide the additional funding needed to move the pilot forward. “The volunteer contribution to this project [in the form of on-the-water survey time, local expertise and services, equipment, boat access, etc.] has been extraordinary,” says Hill. “But the reality is, a project of this magnitude could never have risen very far off the ground without significant financial support as well.”

The Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund (MOHF), supported through proceeds from the Maine Outdoor Heritage Lottery Ticket, has been funding critical wildlife projects throughout the state since it was created by the legislature in 1996. The Betterment Fund (TBF), established in 1955 by the will of the late William Bingham II, a resident of Bethel, supports activities that benefit Maine communities through education, health improvement, and the preservation of Maine's natural resources.

“Year one of the Moosehead pilot initiative was clearly successful,” says Hill. “The project brought together a remarkable coalition of partners in 2008, including Maine’s natural resource agencies, non-profit organizations, Moosehead region businesses, community leaders, residents and visitors, seasoned and novice volunteers, and more.” Hill says she is especially pleased with the accomplishments of the Jump-Start team during “survey week.”

- All offshore areas capable of supporting aquatic plant growth of nearly half of the expansive (74, 890 acre) lake were surveyed. (The focus of 2008 was on the southern half of the lake. 2009 will cover the more northerly portions.)
- No invasive species were found.
- The survey included a native plant inventory. An inventory of this magnitude had never been attempted on Moosehead Lake. A total of 55 aquatic plant species were identified including five native milfoil species.
- The daily activity of the team in and around the lake generated a great deal of local interest, with a number of locals expressing eagerness to become more directly involved in the project.

Now the group is “off and running” on year two. Their goals this year include training a cadre of new plant patrollers in the Moosehead region, reassembling the Jump-Start team, finishing up the lake-wide survey, (which is scheduled for the week of August 16), and doing all that must be done to ensure a viable, locally-sustainable monitoring effort moving forward. What’s next? According to Hill, plans are already underway to take IPP Jump-Start to the waters of another vulnerable region of the state. “Right now, it looks like the next place the team will focus its attention is Acadia National Park.”

The VLMP offers free Invasive Plant Patrol training across the State of Maine to anyone interested in participating in the statewide early detection effort, the IPP Jump Start Initiative, or simply learning more about the threat of invasive aquatic species. To find a workshop near you, and/or to register on-line please visit the VLMP website at www.mainevolunteerlakemonitors.org/workshops/#IntroIPP. You may also contact the VLMP directly at 207-783-7733 or vlmp@mainevlmp.org.

VLMP’s Invasive Plant Patrol workshops are funded in large part by a grant administered by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, with funds generated by the Maine Lake and River Protection sticker program.

For more on the Moosehead Lake Jump-Start initiative, please visit the VLMP’s on-line photo journal at www.mainevolunteerlakemonitors.org/photos/Moosehead/

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