

Coventry Lake treated again for hydrilla

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COVENTRY — Herbicide treatments for the aggressive and invasive hydrilla plant have begun once again for Coventry Lake.

Coventry Lake swimmers will need to find another way to beat the heat today, as the lake is closed to swimming all day due to the first hydrilla treatment for the summer season.

Hydrilla was first detected in Coventry Lake in September 2015 and, if left untreated, hydrilla could quickly choke out the life within the lake's ecosystem, according to the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

To effectively combat this invasive, non-native plant, the lake has been undergoing applications of a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and DEEP-registered chemical herbicide, called SonarOne, made by the company SePRO.

"The treatment is showing great success with very few colonies of hydrilla still flourishing," Coventry Town Manager John Elsesser said.

“We await the results after this season and inspections next spring but we are hopeful we will be able to modify our approach to more conservative means.

“We remind the public to not swim (today), primarily to avoid being in the way of the treatment vessel. We also urge all boaters to take great care to make sure their boats are clean both before and after launching,” Elsesser wrote in an email.

SonarOne is expected to be applied to about 180 acres of the lake’s shallow areas and shoreline by the state-licensed firm SOLitude Lake Management of Shrewsbury, Mass.

The herbicide product is designed to release concentrations of fluridone into the water column, according to SOLitude Environmental Engineer Dominic Meringolo.

“It’s designed to kill the hydrilla without affecting any of the other good plants in the lake,” Meringolo said Monday.

Fluridone works by interfering with hydrilla’s photosynthesis process, or its ability to convert sunlight and carbon dioxide into a food source.

It is not harmful to humans or animals.

This is the third year the town is funding this type of treatment, according to Meringolo.

“It goes to show you how persistent hydrilla can be. We have to treat it for a number of years to control it,” he said.

Hydrilla is difficult to treat because of how it grows.

The plant reproduces by seed but also by fragmentation, meaning any part of the plant that breaks off has the potential to grow into a new plant.

Hydrilla can form dense thick mats in the water and reduce the dissolved oxygen content in lakes, which kills native plants and wildlife.

Additionally, a part of hydrilla, known as “tubers,” can lay dormant within the mud of the lake for a number of years before sprouting into a new plant, according to Meringolo.

To access and destroy these “tubers,” this year the town removed benthic barriers in the lake that were initially installed to help control the growth of hydrilla.

“We have removed all benthic barriers initially installed to assure treatment of those areas, too,” Elsesser said.

Now that much of the hydrilla has been destroyed, the decision was made to take out the benthic barriers to give access to any parts of the hydrilla that may have been dormant and unable to grow.

After today's first round of treatments, there will be two follow-up treatments about one month apart, one in late August and another in late September.

Follow-up treatments take less application time and the lake does not necessarily need to be closed off for swimming the entire day, Meringolo said.

Treatments for the season cost around \$120,100 total and are sourced primarily through town funds, raised through taxes, from funding designated to lake management.

For the 2020-21 town budget, there is \$90,000 in the lake management fund along with another \$7,500 for hydrilla management from prior capital, according to the town budget document.

Additionally, the town is going after a \$25,000 lake management grant.

"We are working with CT DEEP on the grant which is tied to federal funding. We have been assured some funds but they need to be tied to state and federal schedules and purchasing rules," Elsesser said in an email.

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