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New invasive weed

By **Claudia Torrens**/ Staff Writer
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Although the level of invasive plants in Lake Cochituate is similar to last year, the water body has a new unwelcome weed - water chestnut.

The new plant was discovered in the surveys the state conducted last month, and while there are only a few of them in South Pond, the weed already covers 30 acres of Fiske Pond.

Representatives from the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) mentioned the plant on Monday night during a presentation at the Morse Institute Library in Natick to explain plans to control the spread of invasive weeds in the lake.

"(Water chestnut) is not good news. But the good thing is that it can be dealt with fairly effectively," said Mike Gildesgame, director of the DCR's Lakes and Ponds program.

Water chestnut is the fourth invasive plant identified at the lake, after eurasian milfoil, variable milfoil and curly-leaf pondweed. Gildesgame said one of the main goals of the DCR in South Pond is to prevent the establishment of the new, unwelcome guest.

The state plans to spend \$108,000 in Lake Cochituate to control the spread of invasive plants because they clog and damage the habitat, including native plants.

The new surveys conducted this summer show that Lake Cochituate has approximately 64 acres of eurasian milfoil. South Pond has the highest level of weeds - 44 acres of eurasian milfoil and smaller levels of the other three species.

Gildesgame said the DCR will use different mechanical and biological methods to control the plants.

The plan so far consists of doing hand-pulling while investigating the possibility of netting in North Pond, which is in Wayland, Framingham and Natick. North Pond has 1.2 acres of eurasian milfoil, the state said.

Matting, a weevil pilot project, and the study of a machine called the water circulator will be done in Middle Pond, which is in Natick and Wayland and has 19 acres of eurasian milfoil. Weevils are bugs that feast exclusively on eurasian milfoil.

In South Pond, the state plans to use a second solar-powered water circulator and conduct a survey to prevent the spread of water chestnut.

The circulators - donated temporarily by a North Dakota company called SolarBee - are designed to kill milfoil after the water is drawn up and spread across the lake, accelerating the biological and chemical process that cleans it up.

The company is donating the machines for one year, during which the state will conduct a \$60,000 study at the lake to see if the circulators work to control the spread of milfoil. If they do, the DCR will consider leasing or buying them.

The crowd at Monday night's meeting asked about weevils, the circulators and the effectiveness of all the methods mentioned.

Natick resident Eileen Samels, for example, asked about the viability of the options to solve the longtime milfoil problem.

"We are using the options we have," answered Gildesgame. "Will they solve the problem at the lake? No. But we will make some progress."

Jim Straub, the DCR Lakes and Pond Program coordinator, said weevils could be put in the lake in late spring and the SolarBee circulators in late September or early October.

The state attempted this year to apply herbicides at the lake to control the spread of invasive plants, but Natick's Conservation Commission would not allow that possibility.

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