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State says it won't use chemicals in Lake Cochituate

By **Claudia Torrens**/ Daily News Staff

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NATICK -- The state said yesterday it will soon start hand-pulling and suction-harvesting the invasive weeds that have taken over at least 150 acres of Lake Cochituate.

In a surprising move, the Department of Conservation and Recreation said it won't appeal the town's decision to deny the use of herbicides in the lake. Instead, the state will use the mechanical methods Natick favors.

"We decided to accept their orders and move forward with those methods," said Vanessa Gulati, a spokeswoman for the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

One group of residents, though, promises to carry on its fight for herbicides.

Three weeks ago, the Natick Conservation Commission rejected the state's plan to use chemical fluridone at the lake because it said it raised health concerns.

Word that the state would not try to overturn the town's decision was welcomed yesterday by residents who have long battled the use of chemicals. The residents, many of them members of a group called Protect Our Water Resources, say herbicides pose a risk to human health because the lake is a source of drinking water.

"We are very pleased that the DCR is following the instructions of our responsible Natick boards," said Carole Berkowitz, a spokeswoman for the residents group.

Matthew Gardner, chairman of Natick's Conservation Commission, cheered the state's decision.

"I'm delighted to hear that DCR plans to move ahead with mechanical or biological methods. It is important to take steps now to contain this problem," said Gardner.

With suction-harvesting, scuba divers use suction lines connected to a boat to pull out the weeds. Hand-pulling involves volunteers pulling out the plants.

The state had repeatedly said herbicides are the best solution to control milfoil, the invasive weeds that damage and clog the habitat for native plants and fish in the lake.

Other residents of Natick, Wayland and Framingham agree that herbicides provide the best answer to the weed problem, and they have filed a formal appeal of the town's decision.

Sandra Brennan, a Wayland resident who is one of the appellants, said their appeal has been sent by certified mail to various state and town offices.

Joseph Ferson, a spokesman for the state Department of Environmental Protection, could not confirm yesterday afternoon if that appeal had been received. Flooding problems across the state this week were keeping staff busy, he said.





Even with an appeal pending, Gulati said the state plans to move ahead with its plans to use mechanical methods in the lake.

"We would like to start instead of waiting for the appeal process to be over," she said. "An appeal like this could take up to three years."

Three weeks ago, the Natick Conservation Commission rejected the state's plan to use chemical fluridone at the lake because it said it raised health concerns. The town also said the state did not submit an adequate description of the work it plans to do.

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