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## Controversy over chemicals in lakes

By **Claudia Torrens**/ Staff Writer  
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**T**he Milford and MetroWest regions are not alone when it comes to a debate over dumping chemicals in lakes.

The state Department of Environmental Protection granted 240 licenses in 2005 to towns across Massachusetts to apply herbicides in lakes and ponds to control different invasive weeds.

Of those, 47 included the use of Sonar or Fluridone, the same chemical the state is getting ready to dump in Lake Cochituate to control a non-native weed called Eurasian milfoil.

According to the EPA, Sonar is a white crystalline solid used to control nuisance plants including pond weed and milfoil. It is considered safe for drinking water supplies in low doses, according to the EPA.

In Milford, the town is working with different groups to obtain federal funding and dredge 45 acres of Milford Pond to get rid of invasive weeds. The project, which calls for dredging 400,000 cubic feet of material, will cost \$8 million, said Dino DeBartolomeis, the chairman of the Pond Restoration Committee.

"What we know for sure is that we won't use anything detrimental for the water," he said.

Approximately 162 of the herbicide licenses included the use of diquat or Reward, another chemical proposed for possible use at Lake Cochituate.

According to the EPA, diquat is an organic solid used to control both crop and aquatic weeds. It is not considered harmful to wildlife in low doses.

For years, the use of herbicides has pitted residents who believe the chemicals will poison drinking water and kill animals at Lake Cochituate against those who think herbicides are the only way to control a growing weed problem.

Many lakes in the state are under assault from weeds like milfoil, which damages and clogs habitat for native plants and fish.

In Harwich and Brewster, for example, residents have gathered more than 225 signatures opposing the use of a chemical called alum or aluminum sulfate at the 740-acre Long Pond.

"What the town proposes does not seem a good approach to us," said Karen Malkus, the president of Friends of Long Pond.

The lake has been taken over by phosphorus, a nutrient for plants that makes the weeds grow.

In the town of Harvard, Bare Hill Pond is succumbing to variable milfoil and other aggressive weeds.

After years of debate over herbicides, the town finally opted for manual weed pulling and mechanical weed harvesting as short-term solutions. Harvard is also trying a deep draw-down pumping project to lower the water levels in the winter, exposing the milfoil so it freezes and dies.

Bruce Leicher, chairman of the Bare Hill Pond Watershed Management Commission, said the lake was in such critical condition that in 1999, the DEP put it on its list of endangered ponds. The pumping system has proven effective so far and although weeds are multiplying in very deep areas, the system will soon lower the lake temporarily by eight feet.

"We have made a lot of progress," said Leicher.

In other cases, however, herbicides have proven effective, quick and have not triggered opposition.

In Taunton and East Taunton, for example, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) dumped Sonar to control invasive weeds at Massasoit State Park in 1997, 1998 and 1999.

Alan DeCastro, former chairman of the Bristol County Mosquito Control project, said he does not recall hearing any opposition to the plan. The chemical was used twice on Middle Pond and once on Watson Pond State Park and Big Bearhole Pond, according to the state.

"Vegetation was getting kind of bad," said DeCastro. "But the ponds are not sources of drinking water. People just come to fish."

According to state spokeswoman Vanessa Gulati, that was the last time the Department of Conservation and Recreation applied Sonar before coming to Lake Cochituate.

The department, however, gave matching grants ranging from \$3,000 to \$25,000 to towns to apply

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herbicides in lakes and ponds and make other improvements. From 1999 to 2002, the state gave 70 grants to towns throughout Massachusetts to control invasive weeds.

For Sarah Little, the former Wellesley pesticide awareness coordinator, the problem is not a question of being in favor or against herbicides.

"Every lake is different. There is not a single solution to control this problem," said Little. "Each lake reacts differently to pesticides, each needs a different management plan."

Wellesley said no to Sonar last year to cure ailing Morse's Pond.

For years, it used a harvesting method to control its eurasian and variable milfoil problem. Last November, the pond's management plan was approved and it includes harvesting and dredging the pond's northern basin.

"Part of the adversarial side of this is that many people feel their health is being threatened. On the other hand, people feel strong about weeds being removed," said Janet Bowser, director of the Wellesley Natural Resources Commission. "I think it comes down to the town setting priorities. Our number one was the protection of our water supply. That is what guided us."






The towns of Wayland, Hudson, Sandwich, Newton, Lincoln and Andover have debated herbicide use for years.

Lake George in New York, Lake Tahoe in Nevada and Lake Amston in Connecticut are other examples of out-of-state victims of milfoil.

The problem is not cheap to solve.

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