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## Towns analyzing herbicide plans

By **Claudia Torrens**/ Staff Writer

Thursday, March 9, 2006 - Updated: 11:26 AM EST

A state representative told Natick officials last week that even if herbicides are applied in Lake Cochituate, followed by mechanical or biological methods, invasive weeds could still be a problem in 15 years.

James Straub, Lakes and Ponds Program coordinator of the Department of Conservation and Recreation, told the town herbicides cannot get rid of weeds totally, but they can control and reduce their number.

"We have put together the best management plan we could come up with," Straub told the Natick Conservation Commission.

Town Hall's Dlott Meeting Room was filled with about 30 neighbors who oppose treating the lake with herbicides because, they say, doing so would pose a threat to the town's drinking water and kill the lake's animals and plants.

Some of Natick's drinking water is supplied by wells that pull from the aquifer near the lake.

Bill Frantzen, a member of a group of neighbors who favor the use of herbicides, said milfoil is becoming a dangerous problem and herbicides are the best option to control it.

The Wayland Conservation Commission plans to discuss the Lake Cochituate situation again on Wednesday, March 15. Go to the list of municipal meetings at "www.wayland.ma.us" next week to find out the exact time of the continued hearing.

Milfoil is an aquatic invasive weed that damages and clogs habitat for native plants and fish.

Straub said the state is proposing to use the chemical Sonar in South Pond and then mechanical or biological methods like hand-pulling, suction harvesting or even weevils - bugs that belong to the beetle family and feast exclusively on Eurasian milfoil.

State plans for Middle Pond include using Sonar or Diquat in certain spots that need to be treated.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation last week presented its plan to the town with the goal to control milfoil, which has spread aggressively over the lake, mostly on South Pond. The plan was presented in the form of two notices of intent - one proposing herbicides and another proposing non-chemicals methods.

Both notices should be considered together because, if one is denied, the state would try to move ahead with the other to start treating the problem, said Straub.

"How do we keep Sonar 1,000 feet away from the wells?" asked Natick Conservation Commission member Kathy Rehl.

Straub said there is no way of doing that because Sonar would spread throughout the lake, and not only at certain spots. The chemical's use has been approved by the federal Environmental Protection Agency, he said.

Conservation Commission member George Bain asked Straub what would happen if the herbicide plan is appealed, as happened about three years ago, when a group of residents stopped a herbicide plan approved by the town by appealing it to the state Department of Environmental Protection.

Straub said in case of an appeal, mechanical or biological methods would be used on the lake and the herbicide plan probably would be fought in court.

Ann Karnofsky, a member of Protect Our Water Resources, asked him what has happened with the state's pest-management policy of using chemicals as a last resort.

"This is our last resort. We are at the worst-case scenario," replied Straub.

Wayland resident Elisabeth Newton said it is illegal to describe any pesticide as safe.

"I am concerned with us being the victims of a long-term experiment here," she said.

To apply Sonar to South Pond would cost approximately \$65,000, said Straub. To apply Sonar or Diquat to Middle Pond could vary, but probably would be less than \$30,000. Just to try weevils, without counting the monitoring, would cost \$200,000, he said.

If Natick approves the state's proposal, herbicides would be applied by late May or early June.

The public hearing was scheduled to be continued in Natick to March 16.



The Wayland Conservation Commission will be looking at state plans to control invasive weeds at Lake Cochituate next Wednesday. (File photo)

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