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Towns continue to grapple with herbicide plan

By **Claudia Torrens**/ Staff Writer
Thursday, March 23, 2006

The lawyer representing the residents who appealed a herbicide plan for Lake Cochituate three years ago said last week there are "ample grounds" to appeal again.

Attorney Martin Levin said the possibility exists, but the decision will be made by his clients. The previous appeal stopped the state from using herbicides in Lake Cochituate.

The attorney's comments came after nearly two hours of a public hearing in front of the Natick Conservation Commission on the state's proposed plan to use herbicides in Lake Cochituate, which is made up of three ponds.

The state Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) is coming before the town again to apply for its new plan, which includes the use of the herbicide Sonar, also known as Fluridone.

The herbicide would control the aggressive growth of milfoil, an aquatic invasive weed that damages and clogs the habitat for native plants and fish.

The Wayland Conservation Commission continues its hearing on the topic next Wednesday, March 29.

Some 20 opponents of the herbicides packed the Dlott Meeting room at the Natick Town Hall last week and criticized the state's proposal, saying it poses dangers to humans and the wildlife and plants of the lake.

Two supporters of the use of herbicides, Bill Frantzen, a member of the group Save Our Shores, and Mike Tilton, a member of the Lake Cochituate Advisory Committee, said Sonar is the best option to control invasive weeds, and it has been proven many times that herbicides pose no danger.

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

If the conservation commissions approve the proposal, the state will apply Sonar in June, said Mike Gildesgame, director of the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Lakes and Ponds program.

For South Pond, the state is proposing to use Sonar in doses from eight to 10 parts per billion, when applied in liquid form. When applied in pellet form, the chemical would range from 20 to 50 parts per billion per application.

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

The plan is presented in the form of two notices of intent - one proposing herbicides and another proposing non-chemical methods.

Both notices should be considered together because if herbicides are denied, the state would try to move ahead with the plan proposing non-herbicide methods, state officials have said.

If appealed, the plan could be stalled again.

Natick Conservation Commission Chairman Matthew Gardner asked Gildesgame what the state would do if the commission approved the plan subject to just a one-time herbicide application.

"We would be grateful for that, and we would do it," Gildesgame replied.

The state official said the plan is to use Sonar this year and then follow up with mechanical or biological methods, like harvesting or introducing weevils that eat Eurasian milfoil.

"Hopefully there won't be a need to go back to herbicides," he said.

It could be, however, that chemicals may need to be applied to patches in years to come. But the DCR is not committed to applying herbicides in cycles, Gildesgame said.

Attorney Levin said there are too many uncertainties when it comes to determining the safety of Sonar.

"But what is for sure is that you will have it in your water," he said.

The Natick Board of Health is considering a report from a chemist evaluating the volume of Sonar that could reach the Springvale Well Field.

After the town asked him about Fiske Pond, Gildesgame said the pond will be included in this spring's vegetation survey because the state wants to know more about its weed situation.

Natick's environmental compliance officer, Bob Bois, said the state needs to explain more about the

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non-chemical methods proposed to help the town compare them to the herbicide plan.

The public hearing was scheduled to be continued April 20.

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