Management Options for Aquatic Plants

Updated Oct 2006

Option	Permit Needed?	How it Works	PROS	CONS
No management	N	Do not actively manage plants	Minimizing disturbance can protect native species that provide habitat for aquatic fauna, reduce shoreline erosion, may improve water clarity, and may limit spread of invasive species	May allow small population of invasive plants to become larger, more difficult to control later
			No financial cost	Excessive plant growth can hamper navigation and recreational lake use
			No system disturbance	May require modification of lake users' behavior and perception
			No unintended effects of chemicals	
			Permit not required	
Mechanical Control	May be required under NR 109	Plants reduced by mechanical means	Flexible control	Must be repeated, often more than once per season
		Wide range of techniques, from manual to highly mechanized	Can balance habitat and recreational needs	Can suspend sediments and increase turbidity and nutrient release
a. Handpulling/Manual raking	Y/N	SCUBA divers or snorkelers remove plants by hand or plants are removed with a rake	Little to no damage done to lake or to native plant species	Very labor intensive
		Works best in soft sediments	Can be highly selective	Needs to be carefully monitored
			Can be done by shoreline property owners without permits within an area <30 ft wide OR where selectively removing exotics	Roots, runners, and even fragments of some species, particularly Eurasian watermilfoil (EWM) will start new plants, so all of plant must be removed
			Can be very effective at removing problem plants, particularly following early detection of an invasive exotic species	Small-scale control only

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b. Harvesting	Y	Plants are "mowed" at depths of 2-5 ft, collected with a conveyor and off-loaded onto shore	Immediate results	Not selective in species removed
		Harvest invasives only if invasive is already present throughout the lake	EWM removed before it has the opportunity to autofragment, which may create more fragments than created by harvesting	Fragments of vegetation can re-root
			Usually minimal impact to lake ecology	Can remove some small fish and reptiles from lake
			Harvested lanes through dense weed beds can increase growth and survival of some fish	Initial cost of harvester expensive
			Can remove some nutrients from lake	
Biological Control	Y	Living organisms (e.g. insects or fungi) eat or infect plants	Self-sustaining; organism will over-winter, resume eating its host the next year	Effectiveness will vary as control agent's population fluctates
			Lowers density of problem plant to allow growth of natives	Provides moderate control - complete control unlikely
				Control response may be slow
				Must have enough control agent to be effective
a. Weevils on EWM	Y	Native weevil prefers EWM to other native water-milfoil	Native to Wisconsin: weevil cannot "escape" and become a problem	Need to stock large numbers, even if some already present
			Selective control of target species	Need good habitat for overwintering on shore (leaf litter) associated with undeveloped shorelines
			Longer-term control with limited management	Bluegill populations decrease densities through predation

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b.	Pathogens	Y	Fungal, bacterial, or viral pathogen introduced to target species to induce mortalitiy	May be species specific May provide long-term control Few dangers to humans or animals	Largely experimental; effectiveness and longevity unknown Possible side effects not understood
c.	Allelopathy	Y	Aquatic plants release chemical compounds that inhibit other plants from growing	May provide long-term, maintenance-free control Spikerushes (*Eleocharis* spp.) appear to inhibit Eurasian watermilfoil growth	Initial transplanting slow and labor-intensive Spikerushes native to WI, and have not effectively limited EWM growth Wave action along shore makes it difficult to establish plants; plants will not grow in deep or turbid water
d.	Native plantings	Y	Diverse native plant community established to compete with invasive species	Native plants provide food and habitat for aquatic fauna Diverse native community more repellant to invasive species	Initial transplanting slow and labor-intensive Nuisance invasive plants may outcompete plantings Transplants from another lake or nursery may unintentionally introduce invasive species Largely experimental; few well-documented cases

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Physical Control	Required under Ch. 30 / NR 107	Plants are reduced by altering variables that affect growth, such as water depth or light levels		
a. Fabrics/ Bottom Barriers	Y	Prevents light from getting to lake bottom	Reduces turbidity in soft-substrate areas	Eliminates all plants, including native plants important for a healthy lake ecosystem
			Useful for small areas	May inhibit spawning by some fish
				Need maintenance or will become covered in sediment and ineffective
				Gas accumulation under blankets can cause them to dislodge from the bottom
				Affects benthic invertebrates
				Anaerobic environment forms that can release excessive nutrients from sediment
b. Drawdown	Y, May require Environmental Assessment	Lake water lowered with siphon or water level control device; plants killed when sediment dries, compacts or freezes	Winter drawdown can be effective at restoration, provided drying and freezing occur. Sediment compaction is possible over winter	Plants with large seed bank or propagules that survive drawdown may become more abundant upon refilling
		Season or duration of drawdown can change effects	Summer drawdown can restore large portions of shoreline and shallow areas as well as provide sediment compaction	May impact attached wetlands and shallow wells near shore
			Emergent plant species often rebound near shore providing fish and wildlife habitat, sediment stabilization, and increased water quality	Species growing in deep water (e.g. EWM) that survive may increase, particularly if desirable native species are reduced
			Success demonstrated for reducing EWM, variable success for curly-leaf pondweed (CLP)	Can affect fish, particularly in shallow lakes if oxygen levels drop or if water levels are not restored before spring spawning
			Restores natural water fluctuation important for all aquatic ecosystems	Winter drawdawn must start in early fall or will kill hibernating reptiles and amphibians
				Navigation and use of lake is limited during drawdown

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c.	Dredging	Y	Plants are removed along with sediment	Increases water depth	Severe impact on lake ecosystem
			Most effective when soft sediments overlay harder substrate	Removes nutrient rich sediments	Increases turbidity and releases nutrients
			For extremely impacted systems	Removes soft bottom sediments that may have high oxygen demand	Exposed sediments may be recolonized by invasive species
			Extensive planning required		Sediment testing may be necessary
					Removes benthic organisms
					Dredged materials must be disposed of
d.	Dyes	Y	Colors water, reducing light and reducing plant and algal growth	Impairs plant growth without increasing turbidity	Appropriate for very small water bodies
				Usually non-toxic, degrades naturally over a few weeks.	Should not be used in pond or lake with outflow
					Impairs aesthetics
					Effects to microscopic organisms unknown
e.	Non-point source nutrient control	N	Runoff of nutrients from the watershed are reduced (e.g. by controlling construction erosion or reducing fertilizer use) thereby providing fewer nutrients available for plant growth	Attempts to correct source of problem, not treat symptoms	Results can take years to be evident due to internal recycling of already-present lake nutrients
				Could improve water clarity and reduce occurrences of algal blooms	Requires landowner cooperation and regulation
				Native plants may be able to better compete with invasive species in low-nutrient conditions	Improved water clarity may increase plant growth

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Chemical Control	Required under NR 107	Granules or liquid chemicals kill plants or cease plant growth; some chemicals used primarily for algae	Some flexibility for different situations	Possible toxicity to aquatic animals or humans, especially applicators
		Results usually within 10 days of treatment, but repeat treatments usually needed	Some can be selective if applied correctly	Often affect desirable plant species that are important to lake ecology and compete with invasive species
		Chemicals must be used in accordance with label guidelines and restrictions	Can be used for restoration activities	Treatment set-back requirements from potable water sources and/or drinking water use restrictions after application, usually based on concentration
				May cause severe drop in dissolved oxygen causing fish kill, depends on plant biomass killed, temperatures and lake size and shape
				Often controversial
a. 2,4-D (e.g. Weedar, Navigate)	Y	Systemic[1] herbicide selective to broadleaf[2] plants that inhibits cell division in new tissue	Moderately to highly effective, especially on EWM	May cause oxygen depletion after plants die and decompose
		Applied as liquid or granules during early growth phase	Monocots, such as pondweeds (e.g. CLP) and many other native species not affected.	May affect native dicots such as water lilies and coontail
			Can be used in synergy with endotholl for early season CLP and EWM treatments	Cannot be used in combination with copper herbicides (used for algae)
			Can be selective depending on concentration and seasonal timing	Toxic to fish
			Widely used aquatic herbicide	

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b.	Endothall (e.g. Aquathol)	Y	Broad-spectrum[3], contact[4] herbicide that inhibits protein synthesis	Especially effective on CLP and also effective on EWM	Affects many native pondweeds
			Applied as liquid or granules	May be effective in reducing reestablishment of CLP if reapplied several years in a row in early spring	Not as effective in dense plant beds; heavy vegetation requires multiple treatments
				Can be selective depending on concentration and seasonal timing	Not to be used in water supplies; post-treatment restriction on irrigation
				Can be combined with 2,4-D for early season CLP and EWM treatments, or with copper compounds	Toxic to aquatic fauna (to varying degrees)
				Limited off-site drift	
c.	Diquat (e.g. Reward)	Y	Broad-spectrum, contact herbicide that disrupts cellular functioning	Mostly used for water-milfoil and duckweed	May affect non-target plants, especially native pondweeds, coontail, elodea, naiads
			Applied as liquid, can be combined with copper treatment	Rapid action	Toxic to aquatic invertebrates
				Limited direct toxicity on fish and other animals	Must be reapplied several years in a row
					Ineffective in muddy or cold water (<50°F)

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d.	Fluridone (e.g. Sonar or Avast)	Y; special permit and Environmental Assessment may be required	Broad-spectrum, systemic herbicide that inhibits photosynthesis	Effective on EWM for 1 to 4 years with aggressive follow-up treatments	Affects native milfoils, coontails, elodea, and naiads, even at low concentrations
			Must be applied during early growth stage	Some reduction in non-target effects can be achieved by lowering dosage	Requires long contact time: 60-90 days
			Available with a special permit only; chemical applications beyond 150 ft from shore not allowed under NR 107	Slow decomposition of plants may limit decreases in dissolved oxygen	Often decreases water clarity, particularly in shallow eutrophic systems
			Applied at very low concentration at whole lake scale	Low toxicity to aquatic animals	Demonstrated herbicide resistance in hydrilla subjected to repeat treatments
					Unknown effect of repeat whole-lake treatments on lake ecology
e.	Glyphosate (e.g. Rodeo)	Y	Broad-spectrum, systemic herbicide that disrupts enzyme formation and function	Effective on floating and emergent plants	RoundUp is often illegally substituted for Rodeo; surfactants in RoundUp believed to be toxic to reptiles and amphibians
			Usually used for purple loosestrife stems or cattails	Selective if carefully applied to individual plants	Cannot be used near potable water intakes
			Applied as liquid spray or painted on loosestrife stems	Non-toxic to most aquatic animals at recommended dosages	Ineffective in muddy water
				Effective control for 1-5 years	No control of submerged plants

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	Option	Permit Needed?	How it Works	PROS	CONS
f.	Triclopyr (e.g. Renovate)	Y	Systemic herbicide selective to broadleaf plants that disrupts enzyme function	Effective on many emergent and floating plants	Impacts may occur to some native plants at higher doses (e.g. coontail)
			Applied as liquid spray or liquid	Most effective on dicots, such as purple loosestrife; may be more effective than glyphosate	May be toxic to sensitive invertebrates at higher concentrations
				Control of target plants occurs in 3-5 weeks	Retreatment opportunities may be limited due to maximum seasonal rate (2.5 ppm)
				Low toxicity to aquatic animals	Sensitive to UV light; sunlight can break herbicide down prematurely
				No recreational use restrictions following treatment	Relatively new management option for aquatic plants (since 2003)
g.	Copper compounds (e.g. Cutrine Plus)	Y	Broad-spectrum, systemic herbicide that prevents photosynthesis	Reduces algal growth and increases water clarity	Elemental copper accumulates and persists in sediments
			Used to control planktonic and filamentous algae	No recreational or agricultural restrictions on water use following treatment	Short-term results
			Wisconsin allows small-scale control only	Herbicidal action on hydrilla, an invasive plant not yet present in Wisconsin	Long-term effects of repeat treatments to benthic organisms unknown
					Toxic to invertebrates, trout and other fish, depending on the hardness of the water
					Clear water may increase plant growth

[1]Systemic herbicide - Must be absorbed by the plant and moved to the site of action. Often slower-acting than contact herbicides.

[2]Broadleaf herbicide - Affects only dicots, one of two groups of plants. Aquatic dicots include waterlilies, bladderworts, watermilfoils, and coontails.

[3]Broad-spectrum herbicide - Affects both monocots and dicots.

[4]Contact herbicide - Unable to move within the plant; kills only plant tissue it contacts directly.

This document is intended to be a guide to available aquatic plant control techniques, and is not necessarily an exhaustive list.
References to registered products are for your convenience and not intended as an endorsement or criticism of that product versus other similar products.
Specific effects of herbicide treatment contingent on usage within label guidelines and in accordance with all applicable laws.
Please contact your local Aquatic Plant Management Specialist when considering a permit.

Aquatic Plant Control Techniques Not Allowed in Wisconsin

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	Option	How it Works	PROS	CONS
Biological Control				
a.	Carp	Plants eaten by stocked carp	Effective at removing aquatic plants	Illegal to transport or stock carp in Wisconsin
			Involves species already present in Madison lakes	Carp cause resuspension of sediments, increased water temperature, lower dissolved oxygen levels, and reduction of light penetration
				Widespread plant removal deteriorates habitat for other fish and aquatic organisms
				Complete alteration of fish assemblage possible
				Dislodging of plants such as EWM or CLP turions can lead to accelerated spreading of plants
b.	Crayfish	Plants eaten by stocked crayfish	Reduces macrophyte biomass	Illegal to transport or stock crayfish in Wisconsin
				Control not selective and may decimate plant community
				Not successful in productive, soft-bottom lakes with many fish predators
				Complete alteration of fish assemblage possible
Mechanical Control				
a.	Cutting (no removal)	Plants are "mowed" with underwater cutter	Creates open water areas rapidly	Root system remains for regrowth
			Works in water up to 25 ft	Fragments of vegetation can re-root and spread infestation throughout the lake
				Nutrient release can cause increased algae and bacteria and be a nuisance to riparian property owners
				Not selective in species removed
				Small-scale control only
b.	Rototilling	Sediment is tilled to uproot plant roots and stems	Decreases stem density, can affect entire plant	Creates turbidity
		Works in deep water (17 ft)	Small-scale control	Not selective in species removed
			May provide long-term control	Fragments of vegetation can re-root
				Complete elimination of fish habitat
				Releases nutrients
				Increased likelihood of invasive species recolonization
c.	Hydroraking	Mechanical rake removes plants from lake	Creates open water areas rapidly	Fragments of vegetation can re-root
		Works in deep water (14 ft)		May impact lake fauna
				Creates turbidity
				Plants regrow quickly
				Requires plant disposal