

NEWS RELEASE – Non-Native, Invasive Hybrid Watermilfoil Discovered in Rice Lake (LEAPS, 2018)

On June 5, 2018 while surveying aquatic plants in the Clearwater Bay area off the south basin of Rice Lake, a suspect submerged aquatic plant was discovered that looked like Eurasian watermilfoil (EWM), a non-native, aquatic invasive plant species that has the potential to harm lakes in Wisconsin. EWM is considered one of the more invasive non-native aquatic plants found in WI. Non-native means that the plant is not common in WI waters and does not belong here.

Immediately upon being discovered, the location of the plant was marked, a sample was collected, and additional survey time expended to see if any more could be found. More was found, and the additional locations marked. As is the protocol for a potential new finding of EWM, the Rice Lake Protection and Rehabilitation District (RLPRD) and the WDNR were informed and a plant sample sent to the WDNR for “vouchering”. The suspect plant was determined to be non-native, Hybrid Watermilfoil or HWM. HWM is a cross between the non-native EWM and Northern watermilfoil, a native species of milfoil. The possible negative impacts of EWM and/or HWM on the lake are considered to be the same.

Aquatic plants are the most important part of a healthy lake. Many different species of native aquatic plants provide habitat for fish and wildlife, protect shores from erosion, help keep sediment on the lake bottom from being stirred up by boat traffic, and in many cases improves the aesthetic of the lake. Non-native, invasive aquatic plants like HWM have the potential to replace the good plants in the lake with large surface mats of the invasive species that interfere with many lake uses including fishing, boating, and swimming.

Since the discovery of HWM in the lake, the RLPRD has completed several surveys of Clearwater Bay and the south basin of the lake to search for HWM. HWM has been documented in several locations throughout Clearwater Bay, but to date has not been found in the south basin or other parts of Rice Lake. On June 22, RLPRD contracted with a professional scuba diver to physically remove all HWM that had been documented in Clearwater Bay. The RLPRD also submitted a grant request to the WDNR for \$20,000.00 which was approved to help manage HWM in Rice Lake.

Due to the discovery of HWM in Clearwater Bay, harvesting operations to open up navigation lanes in Clearwater Bay have been suspended for 2018. Harvesting operations will continue in the south basin and main basin of Rice Lake, at least for now. Large-scale harvesting is one of the least effective forms of HWM management, generally spreading it around rather than controlling it. In lieu of mechanical harvesting to keep navigation lanes open, the RLPRD has submitted an application to the WDNR to allow for chemical treatment in 2018 to keep them open. It is expected that chemical treatment to open navigation lanes and to further control HWM in Clearwater Bay will occur in mid-July 2018. Public and landowner notice of the treatment is required.

The RLPRD monthly board meeting will be held as usual on July 18 at 8:30am at the Rice Lake City Hall. There will be a short presentation on HWM and what it means to the future of aquatic plant management in Rice Lake at the beginning of the meeting. Time will be provided for questions and discussion. All interested parties are encouraged to attend.