

Lake Lillinonah looks to manage invasive plants

By [Katrina Koerting](#) Updated 3:38 pm EDT, Sunday, September 30, 2018



IMAGE 1 OF 5

The Lover's Leap gorge as seen from the Bridgewater shore of Lake Lillinonah, Sept. 6, 2009 Photo by Norm Cummings

The Eurasian watermilfoil has gotten so bad at Lake Lillinonah that residents' docks are overgrown by the invasive plant, making it challenging to boat and swim and raising concerns that someone could get tangled and drown.

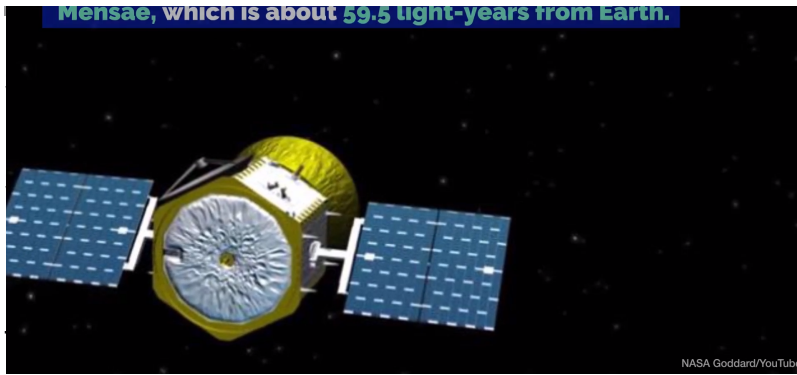
Residents along the 1,500-acre lake have had their own approaches to controlling the weeds, but the Friends of the Lake group and the Lillinonah Lake Authority are creating a lakewide management plan.

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Lillinonah is in Brookfield, Bridgewater, New Milford,



Newtown, Roxbury and

g firm hired to examine the
ion of using a new herbicide,
weeds under control and to
e weeds to keep it in check.

Under the plan, 40.1 acres would be treated the first year and 37.7 acres the following year. Mark June-Wells, of Aquatic Ecosystem Research, said the evidence so far suggests that the herbicide would only target the milfoil and is very safe for humans and other wildlife. It also only requires only a small dosage that disappears from the water in a few hours and from the sediment in 15 days.

However, both the friends group and lake authority opposed the use of chemicals of any kind and said there have been too many instances where chemicals were initially thought to be safe but were actually harmful in the long run. The groups instead advocated for sterile grass carp to be added to eat the invasive plants, something the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection has already rejected for this lake.

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Lake Lillinonah has river characteristics because of how it's dammed on the Housatonic River. This means the fish can't be contained in one area – a DEEP permit requirement for the grass carp, said Larry Marsicano, of Aquatic Ecosystem Research. He

has experience with the permit because he secured carp for Candlewood Lake when he was the executive director of that lake authority.

Scott Conant, a Newtown member of Friends of the Lake, said the group is working with local, state and federal officials to try to get the permit to show it's not a bad thing if the fish swim to other parts of the Housatonic and eat the milfoil.

"I can't think of a river along the Housatonic that wouldn't welcome this," he said, adding they will also look into purchasing a harvester to pull the weeds. These tend to cost between \$150,000 and \$200,000 for a large one and \$50,000 to \$60,000 for a small one.

The statements from the two groups followed a presentation from Mark June-Wells, of Aquatic Ecosystem Research, detailing the lake's problem and listing the different biological, mechanical and chemical treatments.

Lillinonah has four invasive plants: milfoil, minor naiad, curly leaf pondweed and water chestnut, though the biggest threats are the first two. Zebra mussels are also in the lake, which improves water clarity, allowing for more sunlight to get to the plants.

There were 157 acres of milfoil in 2018 and that is projected to be at 180 to 200 acres next summer if left unchecked.

"There's a 650 percent increase in Eurasian watermilfoil since 2007," June-Wells said. "That's a scary, scary number."

The minor naiad has increased 262 percent in that time, but measured at only 20 acres in 2018, which is a small amount for a lake of Lillinonah's size. More mapping and monitoring is needed for the other two plants, but June-Wells said they are being well managed.

June-Wells said it's important to account for the minor naiad because that will be the plant that replaces the milfoil when removed.

"When you control one species in a community, something else is going to take its place," he said. "We don't want another problem after we solved that."

June-Wells repeatedly told the audience that the milfoil will not be completely eradicated and the plan only addresses the plants that are causing recreation problems, such as along people's properties. He said the plant itself is now part of the ecosystem and provides shelter and is a food source for fish.

"Trying to remove it completely would hurt the lake system," he said.