



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Watermilfoil found in Missisquoi Bay

Variable-leaved invasive confirmed by genetic analysis

WATERBURY – Aquatic biologists at the Agency of Natural Resources have confirmed that the invasive plant, variable-leaved watermilfoil, has been found in the southern end of Missisquoi Bay.

Similar to the native whorled watermilfoil, a rare plant species in the state, the variable-leaved watermilfoil was confirmed by genetic analysis this week from samples pulled during a routine search last month for water chestnut in the bay. The genetic analysis was conducted by Dr. Ryan Thum of Grand Valley State University in Michigan.

Lake Champlain is the second confirmation of variable-leaved watermilfoil in Vermont. The first was found in Halls Lake in Newbury in 2008. The invasive plant has also been found in waters of New York, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Quebec.

Based on the preliminary searching done in Missisquoi Bay last month, variable-leaved watermilfoil appears to be widespread in a large wetland complex of the southern portion of the bay and control options may be limited. ANR staff expect to conduct further surveys of the site in the next week or so.

Variable-leaved watermilfoil can be difficult to control once a population is established. Like Eurasian watermilfoil, which was confirmed in Vermont in 1962, variable-leaved watermilfoil is able to grow in a wide variety of environmental conditions, is aggressive and grows rapidly. Dense growth of variable-leaved watermilfoil crowds out beneficial native aquatic plants and can impair recreational uses including boating, fishing and swimming.

Spread of this species occurs by stem pieces, roots and seeds. Plant parts can easily “hitchhike” on recreational equipment if not removed. Variable-leaved watermilfoil is also a popular aquarium trade species, which could be a possible vector for invasive aquatic plant spread.

Under Vermont's Quarantine Rule, variable-leaved watermilfoil is a prohibited species. ANR staff, in cooperation with the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, inspects Vermont aquarium retailers annually. In 2008, officials found two retailers in southern Vermont selling variable-leaved watermilfoil.

The Agency of Natural Resources recommends the following to prevent spread of this nuisance plant:

- Inspect boat, trailer, motor and other equipment for attached plant or animal material.
- Remove all plant and animal material.
- Discard removed material in a trash receptacle or on high, dry ground where there is no danger of them washing into any water body.
- Drain all water from boat, boat engine, and other equipment.
- Rinse all boat and trailer parts with tap water (preferably hot, high pressure).
- Dry boat, trailer and equipment out of water and in sun for at least five days.
- Become a VIP - Vermont Invasive Patroller - and monitor local waterbodies for new introductions of invasive species. Attend a training session and learn how to identify and search for invasive aquatic plant and animals as well as learning about native aquatic plants and animals and their habitats.
- Dispose of unwanted aquarium plants and animals in the trash. Don't release any aquarium plants or animals into the wild.

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