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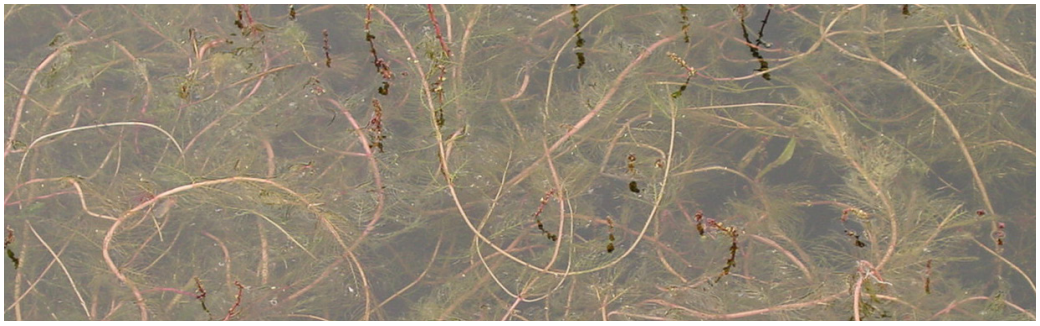

Exotic Aquatic Plants

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The Water Resources Group
Progressive AE

What is an "exotic" species?

An exotic species is one that is found outside of its natural range. Exotic plant species that are currently a threat to Michigan lakes include Eurasian milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*), starry stonewort (*Nitellopsis obtusa*), cabomba (*Cabomba caroliniana*), phragmites (*Phragmites australis*), and purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*). Eurasian milfoil, starry stonewort, and cabomba are submersed species that grow underwater and phragmites and purple loosestrife are emergent plants that grow along the water's edge.

Eurasian milfoil

Cabomba

Starry stonewort

Phragmites

Why are many exotic plants a nuisance?

Outside their natural range, many exotic aquatic plants have no natural competitors or predators to help keep them in check. Exotic aquatic plants often have aggressive and invasive growth tendencies. They can quickly outcompete native plants and gain dominance.

Depending on the plant, dispersion can be by fragments, seeds, tubers or through over-wintering buds called turions. For example, Eurasian milfoil was first introduced to the United States in the 1940's and spread rapidly by "vegetative propagation" whereby fragments of the plant break off, take root, and grow into new plants. Eurasian milfoil forms a thick canopy at the lake surface that can degrade fish habitat and seriously hinder recreational activity. Once introduced into a lake, Eurasian milfoil often out-competes and displaces more desirable plants. Starry stonewort, cabomba, and phragmites also spread quickly and crowd out native plants.

What can be done to control exotic species?

Many exotic plants are transported on boats and boat trailers. If you trailer your boat from lake to lake, you should physically inspect and remove any plant material from your boat and trailer before re-launching. With exotic species, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!

Early detection and rapid response is critical to preventing exotic species from getting a foothold and gaining dominance in a lake. Depending on the exotic plant, however, eradication may not be possible. Chances for control improve if your lake is monitored. Once an exotic plant infestation is detected, appropriate management options should be considered.

Aquatic invasive species mobile cleaning station

About the Authors:
Progressive AE's Water Resources Group has provided lake and watershed management services to both public and private sector clients for over 35 years. Progressive's multi-disciplinary team consists of aquatic biologists, civil engineers, landscape architects, and geographic information systems specialists.