

# Area residents trained to identify suspected plant invaders

By JONATHAN THOMAS

BLUE HILL—There are now 14 newly certified people patrolling the area's lakes against invaders. They carry with them a pocket size list of "Maine's Eleven Most Unwanted Invasive Aquatic Plants."

These new patrollers, and 24 others who did not seek certification, attended a nearly six-hour workshop on June 22 presented by the Maine Volunteer Lake Monitoring Program. The event was held at the Marine Environmental Research Institute (MERI), which was one of the event's sponsors.

Lead presenter Christine Guerette, of the Maine Volunteer Lake Monitoring Program, said later that it was wonderful to get that level of participation. Workshop attendees also received extensive printed materials that summarized the presentations and provided further guidance in distinguishing between the "invaders" and their "look-alikes" among native aquatic plant species.

A major part of the workshop was the "hands-on" training, in which participants examined actual plants in trays of water and were taught to identify the ones that looked like an unwanted species. When a "suspected invasive" plant is found in a lake, a patroller is asked to mark the location and carefully collect a sample and to contact the Maine Volunteer Lake Monitoring Program for instructions on shipping the specimen to a laboratory for positive identification.

If the suspicion is confirmed as true, state

agencies will respond to limit the spread and, when feasible, attempt to eradicate the infestation.

Although chemical aquatic herbicides are sometimes used, non-chemical methods of physical removal of the plants from a lake are often preferred.

In her PowerPoint presentation, Guerette explained that invasive aquatic plants often crowd out native plants that provide critical habitat for wildlife by producing oxygen, shade and cover, and food for native plants and animals. If unchecked, these invasive species can completely fill a body of water, making it unusable for swimming and boating.

Invasive species can thrive in Maine lakes because they are very well adapted to local conditions, are strong competitors to local plants, and, being "from away," they have left behind the natural checks and balances that would limit their spread.

The eleven invaders have been placed into one of five categories based on certain characteristics, according to the "Quick Key" reference sheet distributed at the training session. If a plant does not fit into at least one of these categories, it may be ruled out as being one of the 11 unwanted plants.

The European Frogbit, Water Chestnut, and Yellow Floating Heart are the three invaders in the first category. Plants in this category all have floating leaves.

In the next category are the Brazilian



David McBeth of Brooksville compares some of the plants in trays of water with a printed identification guide during a program intermission. Photo by Jonathan Thomas

Elodea and Hydrilla. They are invasive submersed plants—that is, plants that grow underwater— with whorls of small lance-shaped leaves that are approximately one inch or less in size. The European Naiad is a submersed plant with pairs or clusters of small narrow leaves.

The Curly Leaf Pondweed is a submersed plant with long, flat, alternately arranged leaves.

There are three invasive milfoils that are submersed plants with finely divided leaves. They are the Eurasian Watermilfoil, the Variable Watermilfoil, and the Parrot

Feather.

Brooksville resident David McBeth said later that even with the hands-on training provided in the workshop, and the very complete field guide provided, he expects it will take lots of practice to become skilled in identifying these plants.

Sedgwick Selectman Colby Pert said later that he, too, learned a lot in the workshop. He said he would like to see some of this training extended into the schools. Noting how easily these plants can be spread, he said that it is important to do everything that is economically possible to prevent that from happening.

Guerette said the role of the patrollers is to continually monitor plant life in local lakes, especially along shores and coves near boat landings.

She distinguished this task from the work of the volunteers who conduct courtesy boat inspections at landings to be sure that plant material is not clinging to boats and motors being launched or hauled out of a lake.

Other sponsors of the workshop besides MERI were the Friends of Walker Pond, the Toddy Pond Association, the Hancock County Soil and Water Conservation District, and the Hancock County Lakes Alliance.

More information on the Maine Volunteer Lake Monitoring Program is available from the Center for Invasive Aquatic Plants at (207) 783-7733, or [mciap@mainevlmp.org](mailto:mciap@mainevlmp.org).

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