



# Focus on Aquatic Weeds Program

from Ecology's Water Quality Program

## Funds for aquatic weed management

The Washington State Department of Ecology's Water Quality Program administers a state financial and technical assistance program to manage the problems caused by invasive, state-listed, noxious freshwater weeds, such as Eurasian watermilfoil and purple loosestrife. Invasive, non-native aquatic plants are a serious threat to the health of lakes, rivers, and streams throughout the state. Excessive weed growth impairs fish and wildlife habitat and restricts recreational activities. Funding for the Aquatic Weeds Program comes from a boat trailer fee that generates approximately \$600,000 per year in revenue.



Each year, the Department of Ecology (Ecology) accepts applications from cities, counties, state agencies, tribes, and conservation districts seeking financial help to deal with problems caused by the excessive growth of invasive, freshwater weeds. Ecology awards grants through a competitive evaluation process. Ecology also awards early infestation grants on a first-come-first-served basis. The purpose of early infestation grants is to provide immediate financial assistance to local or state governments to eradicate or contain a pioneering invasion of a non-native freshwater aquatic plant.

For the last several funding cycles, Ecology received more Aquatic Weeds grant applications than we have money to fund. Generally, Ecology awards about \$400,000 of grants each year with about \$900,000 in annual funding requests. Ecology evaluates the projects based on the highest-priority aquatic plant management needs. Each year, Ecology funds six to 15 projects.

Recent projects include:

- Development of integrated aquatic plant management plans for water bodies infested with invasive plants, such as Eurasian watermilfoil and Brazilian elodea.
- Freshwater plant management using mechanical, chemical, and biological control methods.
- Immediate removal of invasive plants, such as Brazilian elodea, using diver hand removal and covering with bottom barriers.
- Research into the sublethal impacts of aquatic herbicide use on salmonids.
- Education about aquatic plants.

### Funding priorities and ranking process

Priority projects include projects dealing with the state-listed noxious freshwater weeds rather than native nuisance plants. Submersed plant projects like those targeting Eurasian watermilfoil receive higher funding priority over projects managing wetland plants like purple loosestrife. Projects with strong local commitment are favored.

## Funding evaluation

Ecology staff evaluate the project proposals received during the annual grant application period and develop a statewide priority list. Ecology offers funds to the highest-ranking projects, moving down the list until funds are exhausted. Staff evaluate early infestation grant projects as they are received. Timing is critical when pioneering colonies of invasive species are discovered invading a water body. Funding is quickly offered to state or local governments to start immediate work on eradicating the invading freshwater weed.

## Funding cycle schedule – dates to remember

Ecology offers Aquatic Weeds grants on an annual basis. The grant funding cycle starts on October 1 and closes on November 1 of each year. Ecology schedules Aquatic Weeds grant workshops in late September of each year. Early infestation grants are offered on a first-come-first-served basis. The agency reserves approximately \$100,000 each year for early infestation projects. See the specifics for each year's Aquatic Weeds grant funding cycle on the Water Quality Programs web site at:

<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/plants/grants/index.html>



## Hydrilla eradication - a success story



Ecology has been working in partnership with King County and the cities of Covington and Maple Valley to eradicate the only infestation of hydrilla in the Pacific Northwest. Aquatic scientists consider hydrilla to be one of the worst freshwater weeds in the United States. Like Eurasian watermilfoil, hydrilla grows extremely densely, forming mats on the waters surface during the summer. Hydrilla displaces native species, reducing biodiversity and causing severe impacts to habitat and recreation. State and local governments and private citizens spend tens of millions of dollars each year on hydrilla control in the US. The hydrilla infestation in Pipe and Lucerne lakes is the only infestation in the entire Pacific Northwest. Eradication is crucial to protect Northwest lakes and rivers from invasion by this aquatic pest.

When King County staff discovered a well-established infestation of hydrilla in Pipe and Lucerne lakes, located in the cities of Maple Valley and Covington, they turned to Ecology for technical expertise and Aquatic Weeds funding to help eradicate this infestation. Pipe and Lucerne lakes are interconnected private lakes of about 70-acres.

The partnership has been working together since 1995 to eradicate hydrilla. Hydrilla is a tenacious plant. It has seeds, overwintering structures called turions, and tubers that help it survive control efforts. The partnership uses a combination of aquatic herbicides and diver hand pulling to control hydrilla. Divers search every inch of Pipe and Lucerne lake bottom and hand pull hydrilla plants. Herbicide application kills any hydrilla missed by the divers.

We are very close! Divers have not observed any hydrilla plants in Lucerne Lake (the smaller of the two lakes) in 2005 and 2006. King County only found two hydrilla plants in Pipe Lake in 2006.

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