

# MILFOIL

(an aggressive water weed)



**Stop spreading it  
around.**

WASHINGTON STATE  
DEPARTMENT OF  
**E C O L O G Y**

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS  
SEATTLE DISTRICT



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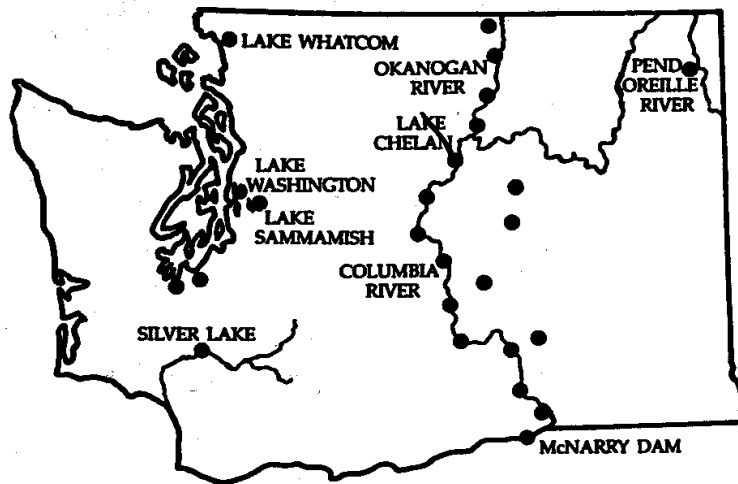
## Milfoil: The Unwelcome Guest

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### What is Eurasian Watermilfoil?

It's an aggressive, non-native water weed which is now flourishing in Washington. It chokes out native plants and spreads rapidly to new areas.

Milfoil was first spotted in Washington in the mid-1970's. Today, it grows in the Okanogan, Columbia and Pend Oreille rivers. It also has infested Lake Washington, Lake Sammamish and other lakes in King, Pierce, Thurston, Chelan and Lewis counties.



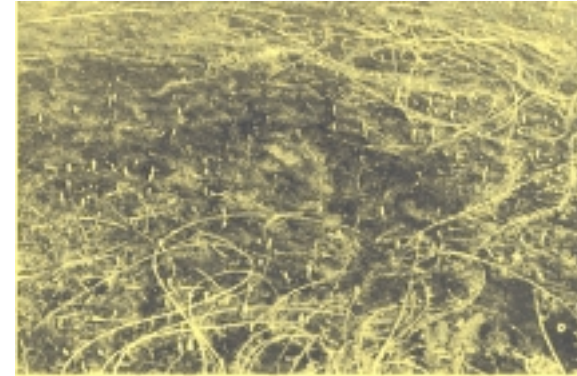
Areas of major milfoil infestation

### How Does Milfoil Get Started In a Lake or River?

Milfoil reproduces by a process called "fragmentation." Milfoil plants easily break into small pieces and each piece can form roots. A single wisp can multiply into 250 million new plants in one year. *Milfoil is readily spread between lakes and rivers by boaters carrying plant fragments on their boats and trailers.*

### Why is Milfoil a Worse Problem Than Other Water Weeds?

Because it's not a native species here, milfoil has few natural controls. By midsummer it forms a "mat" so dense it restricts swimming, boating and fishing. Several drownings have been blamed on swimmers getting tangled in it.



Closeup of milfoil "mats"

### What Other Problems Are Caused By Milfoil?

Milfoil also can invade salmon spawning beds, clog irrigation intake pipes causing pumps to burn out and hinder power generation.

### What Can Be Done About It?

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**Prevention:** Spread the word, not the milfoil. Pick off every fragment you find on your boat or trailer (put them in a garbage can). If you see milfoil on someone else's boat or trailer, help them clean off the pieces. **Remember, a lake can become infested by just one fragment.**

**Mechanical Harvesting:** Floating mechanical "harvesters" can control milfoil by "mowing" weed beds or digging up the roots by a process called "rotovation." Rotovation appears to be an effective control method, although milfoil usually returns to treated areas within 2 to 3 years.

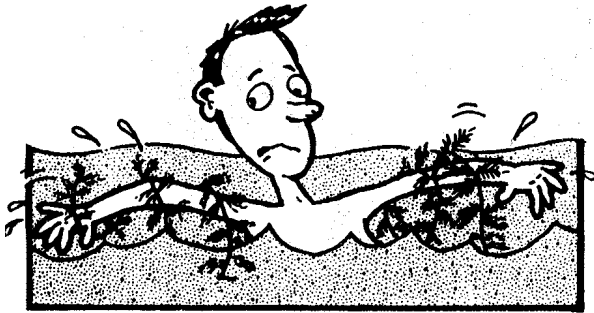
There are also smaller underwater weed cutters and "weed eater" attachments that can be bought or rented.

**Hand-Harvesting:** Hand-pulling milfoil early in the season works very well. The detached plants will float to the surface, where it's important to **gather up all the pieces.** No permits are required for hand-pulling.

**Bottom-screening:** Screens made of durable, non-buoyant material restrict light and space for plant growth. They can be installed on the lake bottom to control milfoil in small areas.

**Herbicides:** Treatment of the infested water with weed-killing chemicals requires special permits from Ecology.

**Please consult with Department of Ecology to find out which permits or approvals are required for each control method.**



## What About Natural Controls?

The Department of Ecology, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the University of Washington currently are studying several biological milfoil control methods. This research includes an aquatic weed-eating fish (grass carp), which may soon be available to the public. However, this fish seems to prefer other water weeds to milfoil.

The Corps also is studying other control methods including fungi and insects.

We will continue to search for environmentally safe ways to control milfoil.



**Milfoil beds on the  
Pend Oreille**

## What Can You Do?

- \* Don't spread milfoil around.
- \* Pull it up and use it for compost.
- \* Keep it down by bottom-screening.
- \* Hire a mechanical harvester or rotovator.
- \* Get more information.

METRO (King County)	(206) 684-2062
Pend Oreille County	(509) 447-4821
Thurston County	(206) 786-5485
Department of Ecology	(206) 459-6000

Ask for Kathy Hamel or Allen Moore.

## Milfoil

- \* Is a non-native water weed now flourishing in many Washington waters.
- \* Develops into new plants from fragments just 1 cm long.
- \* Remains dormant throughout the winter months and exhibits rapid growth between late May and late July.
- \* Has no natural or biological control methods in this region.
- \* Severely restricts fishing and threatens the safety of swimmers and boaters.

Eurasian watermilfoil has a fine, feathery appearance. In the late summer, the plant forms mats on the water's surface and sometimes spike-shaped flower stalks emerge above the surface. Milfoil leaves are green, and the stems are red or rust-colored. Generally each leaf has 12 or more pairs of leaflets.

## You Can Help

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- \* Remove all weeds, not just milfoil, from your boat and motor when you leave a waterbody.
- \* Please don't throw weeds back into the water. Dispose of them in a garbage can or keep them for your home compost pile.

**Check these places for milfoil when leaving a lake:**

