

# Residents put weeds in the crosshairs at Loomis Lake

## Spraying of herbicide at peninsula's largest lake

By DAVID PLECHL  
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LOOMIS LAKE, Wash. — The latest battle in the war on invasive weeds is being fought at Loomis Lake.

After a 10-year cease fire, the Washington Department of Ecology approved a plan and funding for staggered applications of herbicide followed by spot treatments to be applied to the infested lake. Spraying began earlier this month.

"Just looking at it now, it looks awful," said longtime Tides West resident Janet Easley, as she gazed out the window of her lake-front home. "About half the lake is covered."

The noxious weeds are most visible around the fringes of the lake. Since the mid-1990s, when invasive aquatic plants first took hold, recreation and boating on the lake, once popular, steadily declined as the weeds began to strangle boat propellers, tangle swimmers and crowd out native vegetation and fish stocks.

As the problem worsened, a consensus emerged — the weeds had to go — but neighbors to the lake found a solution to the problem did not come easy, as jurisdiction over the peninsula's largest lake was not always easy to discern.

"When you're not in an incorporated area, you're like an orphan," Easley said.

Eventually, the neighborhood groups conducted surveys, hosted forums and through conversations with state and local land-use agencies, came up with a plan and \$75,000 grant funding from the state to treat the lake. The last time the lake was treated was in 2005, and that was a follow-up to a 2002 treatment.

"There's a lot of support for this plan from people who live on the lake, or near the lake, that love the lake, and just want it to look the way it used to look," Easley said. She leads a loosely organized citizen group, the Loomis Lake Restoration Group, that has been at the forefront of the effort that refuses to cede to the weeds.

Eradication of 'Class A' weeds is required by law. However, management of 'Class B' weeds, like the Brazilian elodea and Eurasian watermilfoil at Loomis, is aimed at containment, with control measures decided at the local level. Several applications of herbicide will likely be necessary just to contain the proliferation of the tenacious weeds, say those familiar with the plan.



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Janet Easley's private dock at her home on Loomis Lake rises above approaching noxious aquatic weeds. She leads the Loomis Lake Restoration Group which has been successful at forging partnerships with local agencies to develop a plan to manage the weeds that have affected recreation and the ecology of the lake.

### Facilitating a game plan

"These weeds are not just any weeds," said Mike Nordin, district manager for the Pacific Conservation District. "They are recognized as some pretty bad weeds, and that's why we can get money to do this."

The conservation district secured the grant through the state after homeowners and other agencies, over the course of several years, came up with a detailed vegetation management plan to rid the lake of the infestation.

According to Nordin, the district does not function as a regulatory agency, but instead works to assist stakeholders facing conservation and natural resource management issues. Sometimes those issues affect cranberry growers, dairy producers, fisheries or just neighbors to a natural resource, like Loomis Lake, he said.

A little over two years ago, homeowners around the lake contacted the district after a recommendation from county commissioners, who said they weren't equipped to deal with the weeds. No other agencies had stepped forward to manage the growing problem, and that yielded an opportunity.

"We can pick up the ball and run with it as long as nobody else is carrying the ball," Nordin said.

The conservation district met with lakeside residents and enlisted input from other agencies, such as the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Department of Ecology, as to the best way to deal with the weeds.

Nordin said a review of the lake and input from all those



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Loomis Lake has grown thick with invasive weeds in the 10 years since it was last treated. Now, a new round of treatments is set to begin mid-month, after a grant from the Department of Ecology was secured to chemically and mechanically remove the invasive Brazilian elodea and Eurasian watermilfoil.

agencies resulted in what he believed to be a clear consensus that a chemical treatment management plan was the only viable way to proceed.

"We told the homeowners from the get go that if there was going to be resistance to this project we wouldn't be getting involved," Nordin said. To date, that resistance has not emerged, and Nordin said residents have voiced overwhelmingly that swimming and recreation need to return to the lake. Removing the weeds will also provide habitat for fish and birds that use the lake, officials said.

While the conservation district facilitated the plan and secured the state grant, the Department of Natural Resources is applying the herbicide, Nordin said. This includes several separate treatments to small sections of the lake, rather than one aggressive treatment that

planners fear could result in a potentially lake-suffocating die-off.

"If you kill a lot of vegetation all at once, you get eutrophication, and you end up killing small fish species, so we're going to do it little by little," Nordin said, adding that next year, the lake will be reviewed and spot treatments applied as necessary.

### Homeowners take the initiative

Several neighborhood-led groups have tried their best to battle the weeds as far back as the mid-1990s, when the plants, native to the Amazon, started showing up in Northwest waterways, possibly the result of people dumping out aquarium plants into lakes.

Those tiny decorative sprouts have literally grown into miles of holy terrors, costing municipalities and county governments tens of thousands of dollars a year in management costs. The weeds clog drainage ditches across southwest Washington and are a perennial problem in lakes and slow-moving bodies of freshwater.

Easley watched the persistent spread of the lake invaders over the years from the lakeside home she has lived in since 1987. She said her involvement in the effort to eliminate the

weeds began years ago when she started asking neighbors whose responsibility it was to manage the weeds. Nobody seemed to know.

"I just assumed there was some government agency watching over it," Easley said. "As it turns out, it's not a simple answer."

The Department of Natural Resources owns the bottom of the lake. Department of Fish and Wildlife manages the fish and waterfowl. State Parks owns much of the land surrounding the lake, but nobody was eager to claim the weeds.

That led Easley and others to start gathering information and allies in an effort to deal with the problem. Dozens of neighbors signed off on their support, and county and state agencies were receptive to the group's efforts, but money to treat the lake and a specific agency response was still lacking.

The Restoration Group sought input from residents around the lake and found most supported treating the lake with herbicides. Easley said the plan to treat the lake has the endorsement of the Dunes Bible Camp, the Tides West Homeowners Association and the Sunset Sands Homeowners Association.

She said figuring out who had the responsibility to treat the weeds has been an eye opener. It's taught her that citizen involvement is sometimes the key to getting the wheels in motion.

"If we hadn't started working on this, we wouldn't have started this year, and no one would be doing anything," Easley said.

She's heard old timers recall when the lake was a hub for recreation, swimming, and even motor boat races. The lake is shallow, and free of dangerous logs, undertows, crab holes and currents.

"Our goal is that it will be returned to its beautiful state and be friendly to boaters and swimmers and fishers," Easley said. "It used to be very important on the peninsula as a recreation resource, because it's safe!"

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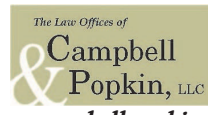
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