

Can Volunteers Make a Difference? You Bet!

Volunteer Early Detectors Help Local Authorities Nip New Infestation in the Bud

The Great East Lake Improvement Association (GELIA) in Wakefield, New Hampshire and Acton, Maine has an active Weed Watcher program. (Weed Watchers is the New Hampshire corollary to Maine's Invasive Plant Patrol.) GEILA's early detection program has grown steadily every year since its inception, and the association now has over 60 volunteer "watchers" on the lake, covering nearly all of Great East's eighteen miles of shoreline. On July 11, 2006 Great East Lake resident and volunteer weed watcher, Carol LaFond, was surveying her assigned sector near the public boat launch on the Maine side of the lake, when she noticed a suspicious plant "standing out like a neon sign" among the native plants. She collected a specimen and brought it to local authorities. The plant was not in flower at the time and species identification was only possible through DNA analysis. (The flowering parts are needed to positively identify most milfoils.) DNA test results confirmed what had been suspected: the suspicious plant was variable water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum heterophyllum*). The response was swift and

carefully executed. Once the invasive plant and its roots were removed, Carol continued to revisit the plant removal site, as well as the surrounding cove area, on a weekly basis for the remainder of the open water season. No additional invasive plants were found. Additional surveys of Great East Lake beyond the cove seem to confirm that the introduced invader was detected and removed before it had a chance to become well-established or to spread to other areas of the lake. Having successfully averted what could have become an ecological and economic disaster for the lake and the region, GELIA has provided us with a compelling example of the enormous--and ultimately incalculable--value of volunteer early detection efforts.



IPP Training on Echo Lake



To learn more about Maine's early detection effort, please contact

Lake Stewards of Maine

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