Littorally Speaking

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When it Comes to Invasive Aquatic Plants, Time is of the Essence
Enter . . . VLMP's Invasive Plant Patrol First Responders

What did YOU do over the Fourth-of-July weekend? Could be you headed for your favorite lake, launched your boat, and dangled your hook (or toes) in the water? You weren't the only one heading for a lake, but for a dozen of your fellow Maine lake lovers, the mission to be accomplished over the holiday was be a bit more serious. For these VLMP "Invasive Plant Patrol First Responders," the job at hand is to scour the entire shoreline and shallows of Tripp Lake in Poland, looking carefully, methodically, with trained eyes, for something they hoped they would not find.

On June 14th a Courtesy Boat Inspector (CBI) on Kezar Lake in Lovell removed a plant fragment from a boat preparing to launch. The suspicious plant specimen was subsequently submitted to VLMP for identification. Though the condition of the fragment was such that species ID could not immediately be confirmed, photos of the fragment were quickly disseminated to the Maine Department of Environmental Protection's on-call expert "peer group." Within a day, consensus was reached, qualifying this CBI intervention as one more official CBI "save." Since the CBI program began, hundreds of invasive plant fragments have been removed from boats and boating gear here in Maine, greatly reducing the potential for spread of these destructive organisms.

But the story does not end there. According to the records of the CBI in Lovell, the boat that carried the Eurasian water-milfoil had last been in Tripp Lake in Poland. Tripp Lake is not currently known to be infested with any aquatic invader. The situation begged a host of questions. What was Eurasian milfoil doing in Tripp Lake? Was it quietly gaining ground there in some back cove, as yet unnoticed? Could the Eurasian milfoil fragment have been deposited in the area of the public boat landing by yet another boat, one that had just recently come from an infested lake? Lacking the full registration identification number needed to find the Kezar Lake boater, and information that might help trace the plant's origin, there was only one course of action to be taken: All of the shallow areas in Tripp Lake capable of supporting rooted plants had to be immediately screened, in order to rule out the presence of Eurasian water milfoil.

IPP First Responders assemble to formulate their plan of action.

The VLMP put out an urgent call to its Invasive Plant Patrol First Responders, a team of highly trained and experienced volunteer lake monitors that have signed up for special duty: responding to newly identified (or suspected) infestations by conducting a comprehensive invasive aquatic plant survey on the waterbody of concern, as rapidly as possible. When it comes to effectively controlling invasive aquatic plants, early detection and rapid response are critical.

Within two days of the Eurasian water-milfoil confirmation, a strategic meeting was held at VLMP headquarters. Members of the Tripp Lake Improvement Association were present to lend their intimate knowledge of the lake and possible points of private access for efficient deployment of the team. "I am so impressed." commented former Tripp Lake Improvement Association president Barbara Shapiro at the meeting. "You all have dropped what you are doing and come from all over Maine to help us here on Tripp Lake. Thank you from the bottom of our collective hearts for moving so quickly."

And quickly the team did move. Within two weeks, the IPP First Responder's Level 3 survey on Tripp Lake was complete. No Eurasian water milfoil was detected, nor was any of the other invasive aquatic plants on Maine's prohibited list; the team screened for all eleven. They also collected native plant data during the survey; a full

IPP First Responders, Sibyl French (L) and Jackey Bailey (R) scour the littoral zone in search of aquatic invaders.

inventory of native plants observed will be available as soon as all the paperwork is in, and posted later in the season on the VLMP's Tripp Lake webpage. A small population of Chinese mystery snails was observed in area of the public boat landing. It is possible that this is a relatively new introduction to Tripp Lake. One small floating fragment
of milfoil was spotted and collected by team Member Marsha Letourneau (great eye, Marsha!); it was sent to a lab for DNA species confirmation, and proved to be a native milfoil species.

With the help of the Tripp Lake Improvement Association, the volunteer monitoring effort on Tripp Lake will continue. Plans are already underway for an Invasive Plant Patrol workshop in that area next summer, and we look forward to providing the training and technical support needed to help our friends on Tripp Lake launch an effective, locally sustainable IPP team on their lake.

Many capable hands (and eyes!) came together during this incident; some working behind the scenes, others on the front lines. Each acted swiftly, skillfully, and cohesively—playing their role in Maine's ever growing, largely volunteer-powered system; working together to protect Maine's lakes, ponds, rivers and streams from the treat of invasive aquatic species. All of us here at the VLMP are very proud to be part of such an impressive endeavor.

For more information on VLMP's IPP First Responders and/or to learn how you can get involved, please contact Roberta Hill at Roberta@mainevlmp.org or 207-783-7733.

The IPP First Responders was first activated in 2009 when hydrilla was found in a small cove on Damariscotta Lake. Team members include: Jackey Bailey, Bob and Sibyl French, Marsha Letourneau, Elin Haugen, Dennis Roberge, Bev Smith, Ross and Bunny Wescott, Keith Williams and Pixie Williams. This year the team had special assistance from David Coyne, Roger Lariviere, Gordon Smith, and VLMP staff.