

## Aquatic plants are not just weeds

To many people, the term aquatic plant is synonymous with "weed", but nothing could be further from the truth. Aquatic plants are a natural and important part of the aquatic ecosystem, forming the basis of all food webs.

Aquatic plants perform many functions, all of which benefit our water quality and our watershed. Aquatic plants stabilize soil, trap sediments and protect shorelines from erosion, helping to keep the water clear.

Aquatic plants supply oxygen and absorb nutrients and toxins, keeping the water clean. They also provide nesting sites for birds, habitat for fish and food for wildlife, keeping the watershed healthy and productive.

### Types of aquatic plants

There are three main types of aquatic plants- emergent, floating and submerged.

**Emergent plants** extend above the water surface in shallow areas of lakes, ponds and ditches. They have relatively rigid stems and do not rely on the water for support. Emergent plants common in Lake Windermere include cattails (*Typha spp.*).

**Floating aquatic plants** may be rooted or free-floating. Free-floating plants obtain their nutrients directly from the water. Rooted floating plants lack stem rigidity and depend on the water for support. Jointed Pondweed (*Potamogeton natans*) can be found in Lake Windermere.

**Submerged aquatic plants** have flexible stems and leaves, are rooted in the sediments, and are completely covered by water. However, some species have flowers that extend above the surface. Northern Watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum Exalbescens*) occurs in Lake Windemere and is beneficial to the quality of water.

Northern Watermilfoil is often mistaken for Eurasian Watermilfoil, an invasive species native to Europe, Asia and North Africa. Eurasian Watermilfoil occurs in parts of British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec and will probably continue to expand its range in Canada. The plant not only has an impact on existing native plants by largely displacing them, but also on fish populations by interfering with spawning. Eurasian Watermilfoil has not been found in Lake Windermere.

### What to Do if You Think Your Boat Has Been in Contact with Eurasian Watermilfoil

Clear all plant material from the boat, motor, trailer, wet well, and anchor before transporting your boat to another lake.

Learn how to identify Eurasian watermilfoil.

Report suspected new infestations to any provincial environmental office or agency.

### **Too many aquatic plants**

The 2005 Lake-use Survey results showed that 37.7% of respondents feel there are “extreme” amounts of plant growth in the water. This may mean that there are too many nutrients, especially phosphorus, entering the water. High phosphorus levels can be a result of the use of chemical-based fertilizers on sod and gardens.

Removing aquatic plants without addressing the sources of nutrient enrichment will not reduce the amount of aquatic vegetation in the lake over the long-term.

Before you can remove aquatic vegetation, it is necessary to obtain the appropriate permits and approvals. Aquatic vegetation is considered fish habitat and, as such, is protected under the federal *Fisheries Act*. Failing to obtain the necessary permits before removing any aquatic vegetation can result in substantial fines, the risk of imprisonment, and a requirement to cover the costs of returning the site to its original state.

Enjoy your aquatic plants - learn to identify them and understand how they work to protect your water quality. A healthy watershed requires aquatic plants.

The Lake Windermere Project and the British Columbia Lake Stewardship Society will be conducting a complete macrophyte survey in 2007. For more information please contact the Lake Windermere Project at 341-6898, or visit the project office located in the old District of Invermere office beside the Invermere Community Centre.

The Lake Windermere Project is a long-term comprehensive stewardship program dedicated to safeguarding the health of our lake. The Lake Windermere Project is made possible by generous support from Wildsight, Environment Canada, Columbia Basin Trust and the Real Estate Foundation of B.C. Information provided by the Muskoka Watershed Council and Transport Canada.

