

Daily Inter Lake

Boat ramp at lake with milfoil to remain closed

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SHELLEY RIDENOUR/Daily

The boat ramp at Beaver Lake will remain closed until the lake ices over, officials with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks said Monday, to prevent the spread of Eurasian water milfoil discovered in the lake last month.

State Fisheries Manager Jim Vashro met with Flathead County Weed and Parks Board members Monday to discuss recreational use of the lake. The lake has been closed since Oct. 24, a few days after the noxious weed was found.

“We are supporting the county’s efforts,” Vashro said Monday. County officials had asked that the lake remain closed until it freezes. It won’t be long before that happens, Vashro said.

The 40- by 50-foot area of infestation near the boat ramp will be marked and signs posted about the milfoil, Vashro said, to ensure that anyone ice fishing on the lake this winter stays away from the area where the weed is growing.

Vashro said it’s unlikely many boaters will be inconvenienced by the closure because “there is a limited amount of boating use there this time of year.”

Last week county officials covered the milfoil with barriers designed to prevent the weed from breaking loose, floating around the lake and planting itself in another area. The barriers also are expected to block sunlight and kill the weed. Milfoil is an aquatic invasive species.

No additional weed control measures at Beaver Lake are planned this fall, county weed Superintendent Jed Fisher said. The weed becomes too brittle in the fall and efforts to pull it up could result in it spreading farther.

In the spring, the weed patch will be evaluated and decisions about eradication and lake use made then, both men said.

Last week, a diver yanked about 50 pounds of milfoil from the lake. Those weeds are drying out at the county weed office and later will be buried in the landfill.

Flathead County Public Works Director Dave Prunty said the weeds will go into the regular landfill and be buried, deep.

“We won’t put it in our compost pile or use it for cover,” Prunty said. “That way we don’t have to worry about any potential transport out of the landfill.”

Milfoil can live outside water for an undetermined length of time. It’s a fast-growing weed that spreads easily and can ruin a lake. It grows in a mat so thick that it destroys fish habitat and it can damage boat propellers. It also chokes out native species in lakes.

County officials, along with Fish, Wildlife and Parks personnel, urge all water users to wash and dry their boats after every use to avoid spreading any aquatic invasive species.

Several groups continue to focus attention on establishing more boat inspection stations in the Flathead Valley to keep aquatic invaders out of local bodies of water.

Glacier National Park has operated boat inspection stations for two summers. Nearly 1,300 boats were inspected during the first 10 months of 2011, park spokeswoman Denise Germann said in a Monday press release.

The inspections are intended to reduce the risk of unintentional movement of aquatic invasive species into the park's waters. Six boats were denied launch permits for a variety of reasons, including not being clean enough to inspect. No aquatic invasive species were found.

"We put a lot of energy and resources into this program," Glacier Superintendent Chas Cartwright said.

He said park officials realize the boat inspections are "just the beginning of a long-term effort to protect the pristine waters of Glacier National Park and the Crown of the Continent ecosystem against the devastating effects of aquatic invasive species."

An infestation of any of Glacier's three continental-scale watersheds would pose a serious threat to all downstream waterways, Cartwright said.

All watercraft must undergo an inspection before launching in Glacier. Free permits are required for motorized watercraft. A new permit is required for each entry to the park. Permits are not required for hand-propelled boats or personal flotation devices.

About 88 percent of the boats inspected in Glacier this year were registered in Montana. The rest were registered in one of 18 states or two Canadian provinces.

During the winter, anyone who plans to launch a boat in Glacier should call the park at (406) 888-780 to arrange for an inspection. Launching a boat in Glacier without an inspection is illegal, Cartwright said, and violators face up to a \$500 fine.

A boat inspection program also is in place in Waterton Lakes National Park, he said.

"Trailer boats with mussels attached to the boat or trailer have been detected in Montana," Cartwright said, "as well as some aquatic invasive plants in local waters recently. This is a serious threat and we must be proactive to reduce any risk."

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