

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 27 October 2011

Flathead AIS Workgroup Asks Recreationists to Help Stop the Spread of Eurasian Watermilfoil

WHITEFISH, MT: 27 October 2011 – The Flathead Aquatic Invasive Species Workgroup asks recreationists for their help. With the recent discovery of Eurasian watermilfoil—an aquatic invasive weed—at Beaver Lake, in Northwestern Montana, vigilance is of the utmost importance. After a lengthy lake survey and positive identification by aquatic invasive species specialists, it was concluded that the lake boat ramp will be closed until there is no longer a risk of spreading the weed. Anyone who has fished or boated in Beaver Lake must clean their boats, equipment, and waders prior to entering another water body. Please contact Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP) in Kalispell at 406.444.2449 if non-decontaminated equipment was taken from Beaver Lake to any other lake so those locations can be monitored. FWP has a decontamination station and a brochure listing approved carwashes.

The Flathead County Weed District is responding rapidly to this new invader and plans to remove the invasive plants this month and eradicate the remaining plants next spring. “We were very lucky to find this infestation of Eurasian watermilfoil early when management is feasible and cost effective. Once established, this plant is very expensive to control. Idaho has spent \$9 million dollars over the last several years controlling Eurasian watermilfoil in its waters.” notes Jed Fisher Flathead County Weed Coordinator. The Flathead Aquatic Invasive Species Workgroup will be meeting this week to discuss eradication strategies to employ this fall and next spring.

Eurasian Watermilfoil

Eurasian watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) was introduced to North America from Europe and Asia, and is found over much of the United States. “The introduction of Eurasian watermilfoil can drastically alter the ecology and use of a water body,” notes Erik Hanson, AIS consultant working on behalf of the Flathead AIS Workgroup. “It forms dense mats of vegetation on the surface of the water that interferes with recreational activities such as fishing, swimming, and boating. Lakes with Eurasian watermilfoil can experience steep declines in fisheries, dissolved oxygen depletion, decreases in property values and the loss of recreational use. Eurasian watermilfoil reproduces successfully and very rapidly, making it a threat to any water body it invades. In the fall and late summer, the plant becomes brittle and breaks into fragments, which float across lakes, sinking and starting new plants. Plant pieces are easily transported between water bodies by boats and fishing gear.

Boat Ramp Closure & Clean-up Effort

According to John Fraley of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, “The boat ramp on Beaver Lake has been closed in an effort to protect a spread of the weed on Beaver Lake and to other Northwest Montana Lakes.” The closure will remain in effect until Eurasian watermilfoil plants and floating fragments have been removed. Beaver Lake is located 6 1/2 miles northwest of the city of Whitefish on Highway 93. The plants—covering about a 12 by 12 foot area in the lake—were found by Department of Natural Resources & Conservation personnel during a field trip last Wednesday. The identification of the plants was confirmed by Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks and the Montana Department of Agriculture.

Flathead Aquatic Invasive Species Workgroup

The mission of the Flathead Basin AIS Work Group is to work locally to help prevent the introduction of aquatic invasive species into the Flathead Basin, and to help contain, control and, where possible, eradicate the aquatic invasive species present in the Flathead Basin. Members include: City of Polson, Clark Fork Coalition, Clearwater Resource Council, Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, Flathead Basin Commission, Flathead Conservation District, Flathead County, Flathead County Weed District, Flathead Lakers, Flathead Lake Biological Station, Glacier National Park, Lake County, Missoula County/Missoula County Weed District, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Montana Department of Agriculture, Salish Kootenai College, Sanders County, Swan Lakers, US Fish & Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, US Geological Survey, Whitefish Lake Institute, and select Flathead County legislators.

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