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Tahoe unveils weed strategy

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RENO (AP) — Scientists at Lake Tahoe are trying a new experiment to try to eradicate an invading underwater weed that is spreading through the lake and the Truckee River.

The enemy is the Eurasian watermilfoil, a native of Europe and Asia that showed up in the U.S. in the 1800s and once was used as an aquarium plant.

The strategy is to lay black fabric layers over the plant to block its access to sunlight and hopefully snuff it out before it clogs water intakes for the region's primary water supply system.

The Truckee Meadows Water Authority approved \$20,000 to fund most of the project the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will

manage this summer at Martis Creek Reservoir near Truckee.

Officials say previous attempts to control it by mowing may have caused it to spread more.

"Definitely we don't want it to get worse. We'd like to control it," said Mark Foree, the authority's general manager.

Sue Donaldson, a water quality education specialist at the University of Nevada, Reno Cooperative Extension, said a lot of eyes will be focussed on the project.

"I'm very interested in this," Donaldson told the Reno Gazette-Journal. "We hope to learn more about where we can use this and how well it works."

The weed spreads rapidly

from plant fragments carried from an infected area and can alter severely the ecology of a water body. It forms dense mats that in some cases have even trapped and drowned swimmers, Donaldson said.

Milfoil first was noticed in the Tahoe Keys area of South Lake Tahoe in the late 1960s or early 1970s. Scientists with the U.S. Department of Agriculture documented its spread to other parts of Tahoe in 1995, and the plant has since become prevalent throughout the lake.

While it doesn't grow well in fast-moving sections of the river, "it will set up housekeeping anywhere we have slower-moving water," Donaldson said.