



## Invasive weed spreads through Lake Tahoe, Truckee River

By Jeff DeLong • [jdelong@rgj.com](mailto:jdelong@rgj.com) • May 4, 2010

Experts plan this summer to try a new way to eradicate an invading underwater weed spreading throughout Lake Tahoe and the Truckee River.

The experiment at Martis Creek Reservoir, located south of Truckee, will target Eurasian watermilfoil. If it is successful, it could be employed elsewhere, including in the Truckee River, where the plant poses a potential threat to water intakes serving the region's primary water supply system.

"Definitely, we don't want it to get worse. We'd like to control it," said Mark Foree, general manager of the Truckee Meadows Water Authority.

Last week, authority directors authorized more than \$20,000 to fund most of the project to be managed by the Army Corps of Engineers.

The effort will involve laying black fabric layers over the plant to block sunlight and kill it.

Previous attempts to control watermilfoil at Martis Creek Reservoir by mowing the weed were unsuccessful and might have actually helped it to spread, officials said.

A lot of eyes will be on this project as a potential method to control and hopefully eradicate watermilfoil in the river, at Tahoe and other reservoirs, said Sue Donaldson, a water quality education specialist at the University of Nevada, Reno Cooperative Extension.

"I'm very interested in this," Donaldson said. "We hope to learn more about where we can use this and how well it works."

Watermilfoil, native to Europe and Asia, might have arrived in the United States as early as the 1800s and once was used as an aquarium plant.

The weed spreads rapidly from plant fragments carried from an infected area and can severely alter the ecology of a water body. It forms dense mats that 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.

Milfoil entered the Truckee River in the late 1990s, possibly carried by floodwaters during the New Year's Flood of January 1997, scientists said.

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.

The weed is now flourishing along some slow-moving parts of the lower Truckee River stretching to Pyramid Lake, Donaldson said.

Over the past five years or so, operators of the water authority's water intake plants in Reno have increasingly had to remove watermilfoil and other aquatic plants from equipment, said Paul Miller, the utility's manager of operations and water quality.

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While Miller said the plant has so far only had a "light impact" on operations, officials are taking steps to keep that the case.

The risk is real, Donaldson said.

"This stuff clogs," Donaldson said, adding that there's a risk it could spread by diversion canals into the Carson River system as well.



Eurasian watermilfoil, in the waters of Lake Tahoe, is an invasive weed that is spreading through the lake's pristine waters. (Photos provided to the Truckee Times)

**Problem plant**

- » The feathery underwater Eurasian watermilfoil, native to Europe and Asia, was introduced into the United States as early as the 1800s.
  - » The milfoil was first found in Lake Tahoe in the late 1960s or early 1970s, and now is prevalent throughout the lake.
  - » The milfoil escaped into the Truckee River in the late 1990s and now is found in slow-moving parts of the river all the way to Pyramid Lake.
- Source: RGJ research



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