W.L.P.O.A.

Whitefish Lake Property Owners Association

P.O. Box 135, Stone Lake WI 54876

June 29, 2014

SUBJECT: Summary – Whitefish Lake AIS Education & Prevention Grant

This document summarizes the DNR AIS Education & Prevention Grant AEPP-241-10. The grant period was from April 1, 2010 to December 31, 2013.

OBJECTIVE

The overall object of the project was to reduce the spread of Eurasian Water Milfoil (EWM), first discovered by GLIFWC in Schoolhouse Bay in Whitefish Lake in 2007, and to educate the property owners and users of the lake of the presence of EWM and how to prevent its spread. Specifically, the project addressed the eradication of EWM growth and spread within the lake, the prevention of the introduction of other aquatic invasive species, the preservation of the lake's diverse native plant communities, and the education of lake residents and users of the importance of native plants and the need to protect them, and the threat of AIS.

ENTITIES INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

Resources utilized by the project included the LCO Conservation Department, the Sawyer County Aquatic Invasive Species Specialist, DNR aquatic specialists, and many volunteers from the Whitefish Lake Property Owners Association (WLPOA). Coordination and discussions were held with the Sawyer County Lakes Forum and members of other local lake associations.

PROJECT APPROACH

1. To prevent the spread of EWM WLPOA worked with the Sand Lake Town Board to pass a local ordinance making Schoolhouse Bay a restricted area as allowed by Wisconsin state statute 30.77(3). Buoys were placed at the entrance to Schoolhouse Bay informing boaters that the bay was a restricted bay and boat traffic was not allowed.
2. WLPOA formed an Adopt-A-Shoreline volunteer group assigned to survey the shoreline on a periodic basis to detect the presence of any AIS.
3. The WLPOA newsletter discussed how to identify EWM and differentiate it from Northern Milfoil and other native plants, and also stressed the importance of avoiding areas where EWM has been discovered.
4. Hand-pull EWM wherever possible, and train residents how to extract the EWM plants to include the roots and avoid fragmenting plants.
5. Use SCUBA divers to extract EWM in areas where hand-pulling wouldn't be feasible.
6. Use the Sawyer County AIS Specialist as an ongoing consultant to train and advise residents.
7. Implement a CBCW program to help ensure that boats entering or leaving Whitefish do not have aquatic vegetation attached.
8. Herbicide was to be used whenever a EWM area was too large or not feasible to remove EWM by other methods.

RESULTS

1. The boat traffic in Schoolhouse Bay was dramatically reduced by making the bay a restricted water area. Some boaters did enter the bay, explaining that they didn't read the buoys and thought they were no-wake buoys. Others, however, knew that the area was restricted to boaters and entered the bay anyhow. Overall, the result was very positive as the large majority of boaters that typically used the bay avoided it while it was posted. We believe the restriction contributed significantly to reducing the spread of EWM to other areas of the lake.
2. Several workshops were conducted for Adopt-A-Shoreline volunteers to help them recognize EWM and differentiate it from other native plants. The workshops also covered other AIS and explained how to identify them. Volunteers signed up to survey specific areas of the lake, usually in the area of their own properties. Some volunteers used pontoons, boats, canoes and kayaks while others used snorkeling equipment. Frequently members of the WLPOA board would get calls asking for assistance in identifying what a volunteer thought might be EWM. Many times the plant was Northern Milfoil, but we encouraged residents to call if they had a question. The Adopt-A-Shoreline program is still on-going and continues to serve as input to possible EWM locations.
3. Each issue of the WLPOA newsletter contained pictures of EWM and Northern Milfoil to aid readers in differentiating between the two. The newsletter also contained a map of current EWM locations so that those areas could be avoided.
4. Hand-pulling has been the preferred method of EWM removal. Residents were trained how to remove a plant by carefully dislodging the roots, rolling the EWM into a small ball and placing it in a mesh net to prevent any fragments from escaping and forming new plants. We consider this approach to have been very successful in areas where hand-pulling is feasible.
5. SCUBA divers were used on numerous occasions to remove EWM where hand-pulling wasn't feasible. The divers were trained to recognize EWM and to differentiate it from Northern Milfoil and other native plants. Each succeeding dive produced a larger quantity of EWM and less volume of Northern Milfoil as the divers became more aware of the difference. In areas where the lake bottom was rather mucky the divers could only work an area for a short period of time before the water column became too cloudy to continue. We plan to continue to utilize divers as they have proven to be a valuable resource.
6. We have been very fortunate to have Kristy Maki, Sawyer County AIS Specialist, available to work with us. She not only has been a valuable resource for training and workshops, but has accompanied us on numerous surveys to check the status of EWM and/or the results of dives or herbicide treatment.
7. A CBCW program was implemented to prevent the transfer of aquatic plants either into or out of Whitefish. Originally we had lake resident volunteers monitor the single launch ramp on Whitefish. Based on discussions with other lake associations and our own experience we concluded that using a few well trained paid monitors would produce better results. We found that most boaters were appreciative of the efforts to control AIS, and were more than cooperative. There were only a few isolated instances of a boater objecting to the monitors asking questions and examining the boat. We tracked the statistics of the number of boats entering and leaving the lake over two years and adjusted the days and times we considered it to be most cost-effective. We plan to continue to use the monitoring program as it gives us a chance to not only check for AIS, but to educate and inform boaters of AIS, what to watch for, and to inform them of areas on Whitefish to avoid because of EWM.
8. Herbicide was used in Schoolhouse Bay when it was determined that the area of infestation was too large to control by other means. We used Stantec as the applicator based on their experience in applying herbicide in other lakes. The WLPOA board decided the use of herbicide was the last resort only if an area was too large to remove by other means. The most effective time to apply herbicide is in the early spring when EWM starts to grow and native plants are still dormant. We do a spring survey to determine the status of EWM, especially in the locations known to contain EWM. A frustration that we've faced, however, is the lag time from applying for an herbicide permit until the time we receive approval. Often we lose the ideal time to apply herbicide and are forced to apply it after native plants have started to grow.

SUMMARY

We believe the project has been a success, although we'd hoped to eradicate the EWM in Schoolhouse Bay before it spread to other areas of the lake. Our experience, however, is similar to that of other lake associations in that attempts to completely eradicate EWM would not prove to be successful, but we have evolved to focusing on methods of controlling the spread of EWM. Perhaps our biggest challenge has been to educate residents and users of the lake to the dangers of EWM and other AIS. We have a minority, but growing number, of lake property owners that are concerned and educated about AIS and are actively involved in its control, but unfortunately it only takes one or a few boaters to spread AIS to other areas. We will continue to educate, monitor and remove AIS whenever we can to protect the outstanding natural resource we have in Whitefish Lake. We are indebted to the Wisconsin DNR for its help, support, direction, guidance, and grants to help in our efforts to protect our lake.