



## INVASIVE SPECIES

### Eurasian Watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*)

Eurasian Watermilfoil is a submerged aquatic plant with a feathery appearance. It has long, slender, branching stems that are leafless near the base. The greyish-green leaves grow in whorls (circular arrangements) of three or four along the stem. Each leaf has twelve to sixteen pairs of leaflets. Its flowers are reddish in colour and grow on spikes that project 5-10 centimetres above the surface of the water. Eurasian Watermilfoil usually grows at depths of 0.5 to 3.5 metres but has been known to grow at depths as great as 10 metres.

#### Concern

This aquatic weed is a threat to biodiversity and a nuisance species. It forms monocultures and its long stems tangle

together to create dense mats of vegetation. These dense mats block sunlight from reaching plants below the surface and provide poor habitat for fish, macroinvertebrates and waterfowl. Eurasian Watermilfoil can also alter water quality. As large amounts of plant matter decompose under winter ice cover, levels of dissolved oxygen in the water decrease. This has the potential to cause fish die-off. Eurasian Watermilfoil can also grow so thick that it inhibits a number of recreational activities including boating, swimming, and fishing.

#### Distribution

Eurasian Watermilfoil was introduced to North America in the late 1800s and is now the most widely distributed non-native aquatic plant in North America, growing in fresh to brackish water in ponds, lakes, streams, reservoirs, estuaries, and canals. It is found from Greenland to Florida, and, in Canada, is found in Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia.



This invasive species can be found all over North America



Once established, Eurasian Watermilfoil is difficult to remove

## Propagation

Eurasian Watermilfoil reproduces both sexually, through seed dispersal, and asexually through rhizomes and fragmented stems. The primary method of spread is through fragmented stems that break apart in the fall. Fragments float through the water, settle and form new plants. Fragments are also spread through recreational activities such as boating and fishing. To help prevent spread of Eurasian Watermilfoil, it is important to clean all water equipment between sites, and if possible, let it dry in the sun and remain dry for five days before moving to a new location.

## Control

Once Eurasian Watermilfoil becomes established it is very difficult to eradicate. Possible control methods include: manual removal, water level manipulation, and biological control. In larger areas, large harvesting equipment can remove the plants while in smaller areas a hand rake can be

used. By manipulating water levels, it is possible to dehydrate the plants and, in winter, freeze them to death. These techniques have the potential to affect native wildlife and plant species. Therefore, it is always important to thoroughly evaluate the situation before implementing a control method. In certain cases, herbivorous insects have successfully eradicated Eurasian Watermilfoil but, in many lakes, herbivore populations are not large enough to significantly impact Eurasian Watermilfoil stands.

## Alternatives

In Halton Region, there is a native watermilfoil plant known as Common or Northern Watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum sibiricum*). It is distinguished from Eurasian Watermilfoil by the number of leaflets. Eurasian Watermilfoil has twelve to sixteen whereas the native Northern Watermilfoil has six to eight.

## Conservation Halton Natural Champion for a Healthy Watershed



Conservation Halton is the community based environmental agency that protects, restores and manages the natural resources in its watershed. Conservation Halton has staff that includes ecologists, land use planners, engineers, foresters and educators, along with a network of volunteers, who are guided by a Board of Directors that includes municipally elected and appointed citizens. Conservation Halton is recognized for its stewardship of creeks, forests and Niagara Escarpment lands through science based programs and services.

For more information on Eurasian Watermilfoil and other Invasive Species contact Conservation Halton:

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