

OPINION

Contributions welcome to editor@plamerican.com, (952) 345-6378

GUEST COMMENTARY

Aquatic plants not just weeds

BY MEGHAN JACKSON AND JAIME ROCKNEY

One of the many benefits of living on a lake is the abundance of wildlife you can see: bald eagles soaring above, mallards diving for food, sunfish swimming under your dock and painted turtles sunning on a log.

However, animals like these would not be nearly as abundant if the lakes were devoid of aquatic plants, or as many like to call them, “weeds.”

Not all aquatic plants are bad, but do you know the difference? Minnesota has nearly 150 species of aquatic plants, most of them being native species. Maybe you’ve encountered one of them if you have waded through a few “seaweeds,” pulled in an anchor hidden by green vegetation or cast into a bed of lily pads while fishing.

To some, aquatic “weeds” are a nuisance. A weed by definition is a plant growing where it is not wanted. By this definition, any aquatic plant has the potential to be a weed if it deters navigation, swimming or recreational boating and fishing. But although each person may view the plant kingdom with varying opinions, aquatic plants play an important role in a healthy lake ecosystem.

Part of plant management consists of balancing different needs. Many native species are considered desirable, especially when they can provide shelter, food and oxygen to wildlife, networks of roots for soil stabilization, absorption of undesirable nutrients, shade to keep the water cool and beautification of the shoreline. This is why eradicating all aquatic plants is neither practical nor wise.

Not all aquatic plant species are considered undesirable. This includes plants that are not originally from this area (non-native), and especially non-native plants that take over an area, which often out-compete the natives (invasive).

Part of plant management consists of balancing different needs.

Most aquatic plants have seeds and roots that cannot easily be fully exterminated. By raking, cutting or pulling aquatic plants, you can actually create more “weeds.” Aquatic plants reproduce by seed banks or fragmentation, and when aquatic plants are broken or cut, seeds or tiny pieces of the plant can break off, take root and create new plants.

Curly-Leaf Pondweed is an example of a non-native, invasive aquatic plant that has been found in many lakes in Minnesota, like Prior Lake and Spring Lake. This particular invasive is a popular aquarium plant that is native to Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia and was introduced to the United States in the mid-1800s.

You can identify Curly-Leaf Pondweed by its wavy, stiff and crinkled leaves that can appear reddish-brown in the water, but are actually green when examined out of the water. However, most native plants have biological constraints that limit their abundance, while exotic weeds grow uncontrollably and invade new areas. For instance, if Curly-Leaf Pondweed is found along your shoreline, it is important to treat for this before it seeds out, which is before most other native plants start getting established. Not only does Curly-Leaf seed out before other plants, it starts growing before other plants and

out-competes the native plants that would normally grow there. It also tends to create a monotypic (one type) stand of plants rather than a diverse stand of native aquatic plants that the lake and aquatic life have adapted to over many years, which provide unique benefits to different organisms.

If Curly-Leaf Pondweed is found along your shoreline, it is important to manage this aggressive aquatic hitchhiker before it seeds out and out-competes the native plants that would normally grow there. Curly-Leaf Pondweed is an early bloomer and will start spreading before most native plants start getting established in the spring. Curly-Leaf needs to be treated when the lake temperatures are between 50 and 60 degrees F (usually April or May) to kill the plant before it produces seeds, which can last for several years.

The Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed District (PLSLWD) has treated Curly-Leaf Pondweed in Spring and Fish lakes in previous years. This year, the district is applying for a grant to fund spot treatments of Curly-Leaf in Fish and Prior lakes.

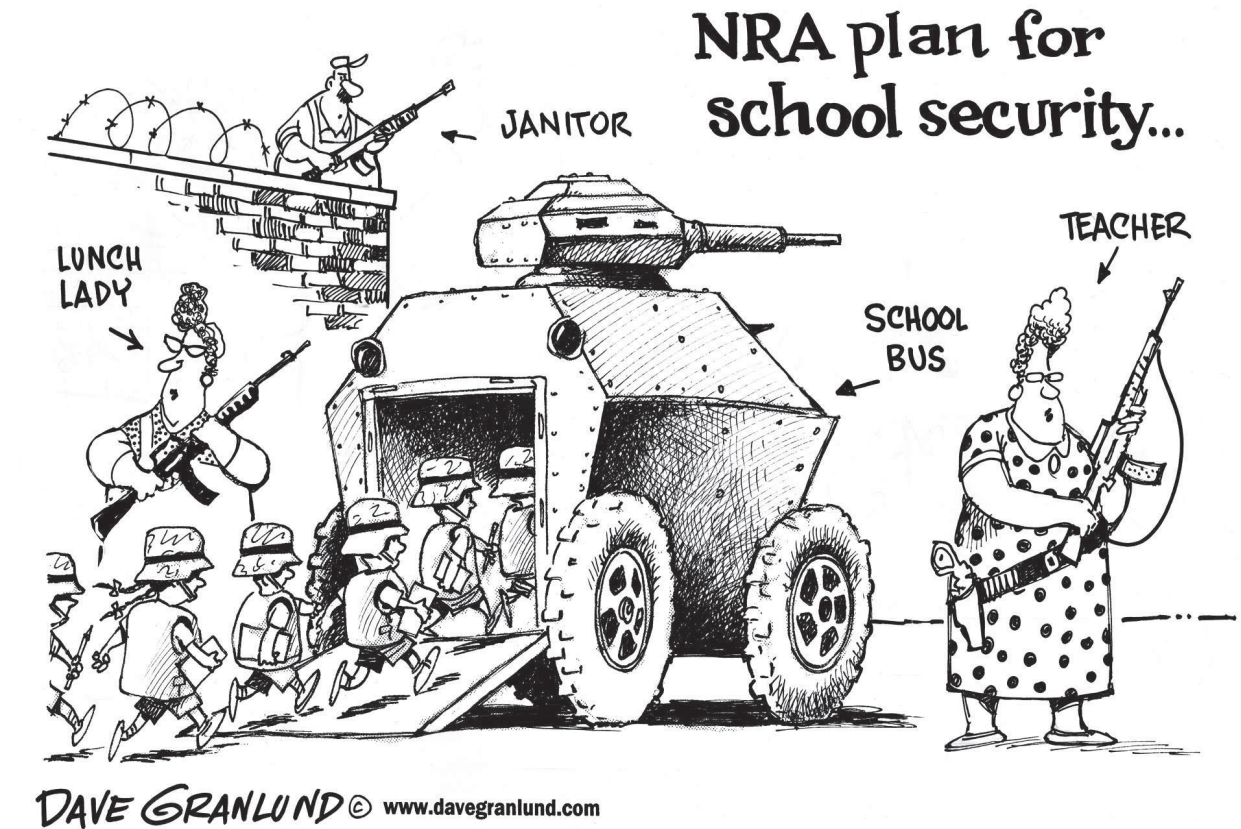
In 2013, the Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed District and the Prior Lake Association have partnered to increase monitoring efforts conducted by volunteers though a new program with the company ciBiobase, in order to help further determine the locations and density of aquatic plants in local lakes. This new program will allow special equipment to be mounted to a volunteer’s boat and the equipment will automatically survey the vegetation density and create a bathymetric map as the boat drives. The information obtained from the new equipment will enable the district to better target nuisance plant growth conditions and influence future aquatic plant management. If you are interested in volunteering your boat or depth finder, contact Jaime Rockney at (952) 378-2166.

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has many restrictions on plant management, so make sure you fully understand the rules before removing or treating vegetation. There are size restrictions limiting the amount of vegetation that can be removed, and a permit is needed for any herbicide treatment. To learn more about the DNR’s aquatic plant regulations, visit www.dnr.state.mn.us.

“Restore Your Shore” is another useful website to help you develop a deeper understanding of shoreland ecosystems and management, as well as plant identification. Check www.dnr.state.mn.us/restoreyourshore/index.html.

When possible, prevention is the most important course of action in aquatic weed control. Boats and boat trailers are major avenues of moving invasive species from one body of water to the next. Liking raking or cutting weeds, tiny fragments can attach to boat props or trailers, or be held in live wells or bilge water, and infest new water bodies. Help prevent the spread of invasive aquatic plants by taking the time to familiarize yourself with invasive species and thoroughly checking your boats and trailers and dumping any water held in the equipment.

Meghan Jackson is the district outreach specialist for the Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed District. Jaime Rockney is a water resources specialist for the district.



LETTERS

CITY HALL

Do spring cleaning at City Hall

From an earlier story in the Prior Lake American, we learn that the city attorney is requesting the state attorney general to provide an opinion on whether City Hall is required to disclose the city manager’s total income. We also learn that now city staff is going to spend three months studying the issue.

It’s not complicated. Of course City Hall should disclose the city manager’s total salary, and apparently some council members agree. If the mayor would step up and insist on doing what’s right, the issue could be dealt with without the City Hall games. If the city attorney and/or city manager don’t agree, it’s time for some spring house cleaning at City Hall. It’s just that simple.

Mike Gresser
Prior Lake

DISTRICT 719

School finance questions need answering

A few weeks ago, the school district announced a massive capital improvement program, with the announcement that taxes would not go up because of “state-

NRA plan for school security...

approved lease levy financing” and “no additional cost to taxpayers.”

I started thinking about that and called for clarification. My understanding is that they are borrowing a bunch of money at a lower rate of interest and stretching the payments over a longer period of time so the amount that is levied for taxes stays the same.

In the announcement from the board of education is the implication that it isn’t going to cost the taxpayers anything. Would you conclude that if it were your home being refinanced?

Part of this refinancing is at lower interest rates. Refinancing at rates that have dropped is what they should do even if there was no building program.

I voted for some of those bonds, and I did not expect that when they were partially paid down, I was authorizing the school district to be able to borrow against my authorization again. Additionally, a big chunk of the money was to expand the high school, and another amount was for “maintenance.” There must be a list of the areas where these sums are going to be spent. Why not publish them so the populace can see what these plans cover?

In addition, show us the used portion of capacity in every school building, to see if some other solution can be found, like moving sixth grade and ninth grade back to where they were traditionally.

They say there is no bubble at the high school. Didn’t south Minneapolis, Richfield, Burnsville, Lakeville and others make the same claim?

Robert Peterson
Prior Lake

LETTERS POLICY

All letters to the editor submitted for publication in the Prior Lake American will be verified before they are printed. In addition to the letter writer’s name, the letter should contain an address and daytime and evening telephone numbers so the newspaper staff can verify the letter writer’s identity. The Prior Lake American will not print any unver-

fied letters, nor any letters without all the above mentioned information.

Letters that are potentially libelous will not be printed or will be edited. However, letters will not be refused because staff disagrees with their content. Letters may be edited as space requires. Not all thank you letters will be printed. Writers should keep their comments under 500 words.

Letter writers are limited to one letter per month.

Letters to the editor may be sent to: Prior Lake American, P.O. Box 538, Prior Lake, MN 55372 or to editor@plamerican.com. Call Lori Carlson, editor, at (952) 345-6378 for further information.

The deadline for letters to the editor is noon Wednesdays.

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