

## Whack the Weeds – Dave deCalesta 3/2014

For lakeside properties with a solid shale lake bottom there is little opportunity for aquatic weeds to take root. These lucky homeowners generally don't have problems with weeds out front. However, for those of us with lake bottoms silted in from run-off in the watershed above us, aquatic weeds can choke our off-dock areas, making swimming unpleasant and fishing difficult.

We were fortunate in that the spring migration of ducks, primarily redheads, dropped several hundred hungry ducks right off our dock and they generally totally ate and removed the aquatic weeds. Come spring, the lake bottom off our dock was bare muck. Squishy to walk on, but swimming and fishing were fun and unhindered. But unfortunately, the weeds totally grew back by July. What to do? Common solutions tried elsewhere (and on Keuka) are reviewed below:

- *Kill the weeds with an herbicide.* A permit is required and likely would be denied by the permitting agency (DEC) because affected area is public water used for drinking and for stocking trout (website for info is: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/regs/4422.html>). Only kills leaves and stems, not roots, so must be re-applied and repeat applications generally are not approved.
- *Block sun to weeds by covering the lake bottom over weedy areas with plastic sheets or mats called benthic barriers ("lake mats").* The sheets/mats must be spread on the lake bottom and weighted down with rocks/cinder blocks. Scuba equipment useful to stay under water to do this. Hard to do, and after time, sediments build up on mats, allowing weeds to regrow. Wave action may also dislodge the mats/sheets.
- *Corn and carp.* Dried corn feed is spread over area with weeds and attracts carp, which feed on the corn and on aquatic weeds. Start in early spring, continue through summer. Downsides: may not work, carp make water turbid, eat eggs of game fish.
- *Cut weeds at base with cutters.* Weeds are cut off at the lake bottom with devices and then float to shore where they can be dried/composted. Usually done more than once during summer. Commonest devices are "lake rakes" and weed whips. Lake rakes (with attached rope) are thrown from shore or the dock and pulled back to cut off weeds. May also be towed behind boats. Rakes can snag and disrupt water lines, destroy fish nesting sites and may not cut weeds off at their bases. Weed whips (my personal choice) are used by swimming over the weedy area (with snorkel, mask, and fins) and cutting weeds with a back and forth motion. Weed whips allow precise removal of weeds in selected areas, rakes sometimes miss areas. Whips can reach down to a depth of ~ 5 feet; rakes can go deeper.



Weed Whip



Lake Rake

A side benefit to lake mats or cutting weeds is that a fairly sharp boarder between weedy areas and weed-free areas can be created. This "edge affect" is like a field next to a forest - deer live in the forest but come out into the field to feed. Same for fish - they will hide in the weedy "forest" and dart out to forage on baits or lures cast along the "edge."