Chicaugon Lake Association volunteers use nets to skim any broken plants on the surface so they wouldn't take root elsewhere. (Joe Shubat photo)

IRON COUNTY—A number of Chicaugon Lake Association members recently organized a crew and gathered their boats for a Saturday morning work session on the lake to hand-pull Eurasian milfoil.

A spokesperson for the association stated that Eurasian milfoil is a plant that aggressively grows and rapidly spreads throughout freshwater lakes once introduced. It harms lakes by smothering out native species of plants and clogging the shorelines with uninhibited plant growth, thereby reducing fishing and other recreational opportunities.

__PUBLIC__

Left unchecked, Eurasian milfoil will grow to a point where a lake becomes smothered amid a surface layer of weeds rendering it unusable.

Besides Chicaugon Lake other nearby lakes area also infected. They include Ice Lake, Iron Lake, Bass Lake, Buck Lake, Duck Lake and many others.

The association noted that a number of treatment options are available. They had volunteer certified scuba divers spending the morning underwater, pulling patches of milfoil, one plant at a time by the roots.

A number of other volunteers on the surface were ready and waiting properly disposing of the nuisance plants as the divers arrived on the surface.

Other nearby boaters used nets to skim any broken plants on the surface so they wouldn't take root elsewhere.

The effort was successful as a number of patches of milfoil on the East end of the lake running from just off shore to about 30-feet deep were uprooted and destroyed.

Some patches were just too thick to attempt to pull and will have to be treated in the future. A number of future weekends will be dedicated to the same effort.

A spokesperson said that it is predicted by engineers who have studied Chicaugon Lake that if left unmanaged, that as much as 500 acres of the 1,100 acre lake could be covered in milfoil in five years, all shoreline areas out to about 30-feet deep.

Absent a management program by state agencies, the Chicaugon Lake Association assumed a leadership role in protecting this pristine natural resource and developed an aggressive stance in combating Eurasian milfoil.

Treatments approved by the U.S. Forest Service and the Michigan DNR, were conducted in 2007 using both chemical and natural means (milfoil weevils).

As both means are expensive, there was limited success. There are very limited state funding sources and so it is left to property owners to fund any substantial lake cleanup.

To that end, the Chicaugon lake Association has since raised over $25,000 mostly by property owners. In June of this year, over 15 acres of milfoil were successfully treated according to state guidelines. Additional treatments are planned for 2013 and 2014. The Lake Association has stated that it will continue to use a multi-pronged approach to managing the lake in an effort to control the spread of Eurasian milfoil that includes treatment, natural means where practical (hand-pulling) and education.

The association is promoting common sense for those using the lake for recreational purposes.

Recommendations for boaters include a pre-launch inspection for all recreation equipment including boats, trailers skis, motors fins, floats fishing gear and anchors for removal of aquatic plants.

In addition, drain all water from the boat including bilge, live well, bait well before you leave the lake.

Dispose of any leftover or unusable bait in trash cans and not in the water and just as important, rinse your boat and fishing equipment thoroughly or/and make sure your boat and equipment is completely dry before moving to another lake.

Although there is much to say about how it got this way, says the association, one thing is for sure - the solution is in the all the people who use, appreciate and value the resource.

With a continued effort by lake property owners and other users of this wonderful natural resource, the problem can be managed and controlled.