The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station

123 HUNTINGTON STREET BOX 1106 NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT 06504

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For more information contact:
Michelle D. Marko, Ph.D.
The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station
Box 1106, 123 Huntington Street
New Haven, CT 06504
Phone: 203-974-8610
Email: Michelle.Marko@po.state.ct.us

Or

Jason C. White, Ph.D.
The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station
Box 1106, 123 Huntington Street
New Haven, CT 06504
Phone: 203-974-8523
Email: Jason.White@po.state.ct.us

Watermilfoil, weevils and what can be done

Joint effort between scientists, lake managers and a private company will assess the potential for biological control of Eurasian watermilfoil at Candlewood Lake"

NEW HAVEN, Conn. (June 27, 2008) – Western Connecticut's Candlewood Lake is the largest and most heavily used lake in the state. Managers from the Candlewood Lake Authority (CLA) are teaming up with scientists at The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES) and Western Connecticut State University and technicians at EnviroScience, Inc. on a collaborative effort to manage the invasive aquatic plant Eurasian watermilfoil in the lake.

As an alternative to the traditional methods of control – chemical and mechanical – the group will test the possibility of reducing the milfoil population through biological control methods, specifically, the native milfoil weevil.

"The milfoil weevil has shown great success in controlling Eurasian watermilfoil in some lakes but not in others," cautioned Dr. Michelle Marko of CAES. "By establishing these monitoring sites we'll discover whether it can be successful in Candlewood Lake.

A March 2005 study by the Candlewood Lake Authority revealed that the third most pressing community concern was, "decreasing water quality." Scientists with the Invasive Aquatic Plant Program (IAPP) at CAES have found that Candlewood Lake has over 250 acres of Eurasian watermilfoil that are directly impacting overall water quality.

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"Eurasian watermilfoil is a significant issue at Candlewood Lake and comprises the vast majority of the aquatic plant flora. The high levels of recreational boating pressures have improved on the success of propagation making the species extremely invasive," said Larry Marsicano of CLA.

CAES scientists will conduct experiments in three sites, measuring the existing milfoil and weevil populations. Changes in the aquatic plant community will be monitored by visual inspections and biomass sampling.

EnviroScience, Inc. will apply weevils to the three sites using the MiddFoil® process. The company is currently the only entity engaged in the commercial production and release of the milfoil weevil.

The biological control of invasive aquatic plants such as Eurasian watermilfoil is one of the research objectives of the Invasive Aquatic Plant Program (IAPP) at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES). The IAPP began in August of 2002 and is a collaborative project between scientists in the Department of Soil and Water at CAES and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Invasive Plant Research Laboratory (IPRL) in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Since 2002, CAES scientists have been surveying Connecticut lakes and ponds for invasive aquatic plants and investigating various management options. Surveillance and monitoring are focused specifically on invasive aquatic plant species, but the location and abundance of native submerged and floating-leaved plants are also documented. To date, the plant communities of 133 water bodies have been comprehensively investigated. This research will allow us to track the spread of invasive plants and to record the arrival of new invasive species. Surveys also will provide baseline information on the changes in native plant communities as a response to invasions, and if the frequency and magnitude of those invasions are related to changing climate conditions. Management studies include tests on the effect of herbicides, mechanical removal, biological control, and integrated pest management on invasive species control and plant community dynamics. CAES scientists currently have research-based management studies ongoing in six separate lakes in the state, as well as smaller microcosm investigations at our experimental farm in Hamden and our main laboratory in New Haven.

Contacts:

- The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station
  - Michelle D. Marko, Ph.D., 203-974-8610, Michelle.Marko@po.state.ct.us
  - Jason C. White, Ph.D., 203-974-8523, Jason.White@po.state.ct.us
  - Greg Bugbee, 203-974-8512, Greg.Bugbee@po.state.ct.us
- Western Connecticut State University
  - Mitch Wagener, Ph.D., 203-837-8790, wagenerm@wcsu.edu
- Candlewood Lake Authority
  - Larry Marsicano, 860-354-6928, claexecdir@earthlink.net
- EnviroScience, Inc.
  - Marty Hilovsky, President, 330-688-0111
  - Cortney Marquette, 330-688-0111

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