

Costs of Invasive Species

Invasive aquatic species pose a significant problem for our state. Nationally, hundreds of millions of dollars are spent every year in efforts to control aquatic invasive species. Experts in the field agree that money spent on prevention is a wise investment. Once an invasive species takes hold, it is virtually impossible to eliminate it from a lake or stream. The cost of managing the problem, let alone the economic downside to infestations, is enormous. Here are some figures to put it into perspective:

- All the new England states as well as 41 other states and six Canadian provinces, are battling milfoil, water chestnut and other plants as well as invaders such as zebra mussels.
- Mechanical or chemical means of control can typically cost \$200-2000 per lake-acre each year, with no end in sight.
- New research in Vermont shows that invasive plants can cost shoreline owners over \$12,000 each in lost property values on infested lakes.
- Since the early 1980's Vermont has spent over \$6 million dollars in state, federal and local funds to prevent and control the spread of invasive aquatic species. That state now spends more than \$200,000 annually just on staff devoted to managing the problem on 46 of its 285 larger lakes.
- New Hampshire spends close to \$100,000 each year in state-local operating funds to cost share on 7-9 control projects. This does not come close to the public demand for projects on their 55 infested lakes.
- Massachusetts spends over \$290,000 annually on grants for local lake projects, most of which is spent on invasives control in their 298 infested lakes. The state also spends \$95,000 each year for control operations just on state properties.
- In 1998 alone, Connecticut spent more than \$150,000 in state funds to cost share local projects for invasives control.

Maine has been spared the worst of this problem, but already some local groups are struggling with invasive plants. The cost of these invasions could prove to be enormous. If we saw a fraction of Vermont's infestation rate just in our southern five counties, the property value loss alone would exceed \$11 million and control costs could reach \$2-4 million/year. This does not even begin to tally losses in local tourism dollars, fishing, and water sports opportunities, and the wholesale alteration of habitat. We should consider the very great losses we face if we do not mount an effective effort to combat the spread of these invasive species.