

Milfoil in the Suncook River Watershed

(Submitted by Pam Miller)

The Barnstead Milfoil Committee has had a very busy and productive year. In the fall of 2006 you may have noticed that the Suncook River water level in Barnstead above the Parade dam was very low for a couple of weeks. The BMC working together with NHDES, NHDOA, NH Fish and Game and the local dam operators lowered the water level in stages to map the location of milfoil and to study the water currents in preparation for a spring milfoil treatment. Large shallow areas were allowed to dry out for days exposing the milfoil. This was intended to reduce the foliage. With less foliage the spring treatment would be more effective and less chemical would be needed.

The winter months were spent studying data from the fall draw down, applying for grants, planning and coordinating with all necessary agencies, informing the abutters, educating the public and applying for grants and permits. All in all it was a very complicated process.



*Variable
Milfoil*

In early May the plan was put to the test. The water level was drawn down again in stages. The goal was to treat the river at four levels. The chemical 2,4-D was used at each level and allowed to sit for 5 days where it would drop to the bottom and be absorbed by the plants roots. The chemical 2,4-D is technically a plant growth hormone. Because milfoil is such a fast growing plant the chemical is absorbed quickly and breaks down the molecular structure of the plant. It does not affect the native plants in the river. It is inert in humans and animals and should have little to no affect on the native wildlife. The chemical levels were carefully monitored throughout the process. We received some rain during the third week of treatment, which created fluctuations in the water level. This may have affected the efficiency of the treatment at that depth.

When water levels were at their lowest the town was able to install a new boat launch by the Parade dam as the old one had been damaged by 2 years of flooding. The water levels were quickly brought back up to normal in early June. In early July the committee located a few patches of milfoil that had not been killed. These areas will be surrounded with netting to avoid plant segments from floating down stream and rooting. Divers will be sent in to check for plants along the edges of the main channel. Any remaining plants will be pulled or spot treated.

The BMC is hopeful that with careful monitoring any remaining milfoil will be controlled in the future by divers specially trained in milfoil removal. This whole project was made possible by a dedicated group of volunteers who have put in countless hours to try to return the Suncook River to it's natural state. You can help too. If you are out on the river and see any milfoil segments floating on the surface please remove them from the river.

If you would like more information on milfoil, or would like to see the complete report submitted to DES, please go to: <http://www.des.state.nh.us/wmb/exoticspecies>.



bladderwort

Bladderwort is a free-floating aquatic and can easily be mistaken for milfoil. It is a carnivorous plant that captures aquatic invertebrates in its bladders and then breaks these organisms down to nitrogen and other nutrients. Milfoil segments look similar but have no bladders. Bladderwort is a native species. Variable milfoil is not. By removing floating milfoil segments you can help to stop its spread. To dispose of collected segments: place in a sealed garbage bag or in your compost bin.

