



TEXAS RAMPING UP FIGHT AGAINST AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES



TEXAS LEGISLATURE APPROPRIATES \$6.5 MILLION TO FUND CONTROL MEASURES, RESEARCH EFFORTS

January 8, 2016

AUSTIN – Texas is ramping up its efforts in the Pineywoods ecoregion of East Texas to fight the invasion of aquatic species that pose significant threats to the state's environment and its economy.

Aquatic invasive species are costing Texas billions of dollars annually in lost property values, lost water, lost potential for power generation, degradation of the state's natural resources, and management costs. The potential economic loss in property values alone as a result of continued aquatic invasive infestation in Texas has been estimated at upwards of \$17.5 billion. Additionally, when left untreated, these plants can significantly impair outdoor recreational activities like boating, fishing and waterfowl hunting.

Efforts to combat these impacts got a much-needed boost this year, thanks to \$6.5 million in legislative appropriations during the last session that state officials believe will be crucial to address the problem over this two-year biennium.

“Without adequate management efforts, the problem will only continue to worsen,” said Rep. Chris Paddie. “Combatting the spread of invasive species is one of the most pressing issues for our lakes, businesses and sportsman. The increased funding shows the legislature’s commitment to combating the spread of invasive species and I look forward to working with the Parks and Wildlife Department to combat these species.”

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, in partnership with other agencies and stakeholders, has been battling against the spread of aquatic invasive plants such as giant salvinia, water hyacinth, and hydrilla for decades with limited success. Research into various management options has shown promise toward controlling the spread of these plants, but come with a price tag that until now has been out of reach.

As a result of the new funding, additional resources being directed at aquatic invasive management include \$1.4 million for herbicidal vegetation control treatment, biological treatment, and new TPWD staff positions in East Texas dedicated to aquatic invasive management, including capabilities for small infestation rapid response.

Other funded projects include \$400,000 for a zebra mussel and giant salvinia outreach and public awareness marketing campaign, development of a new giant salvinia herbicide, exotic fish research, and native plant restoration.

Some of the work has already begun. For example:

- Out of the 20-plus public water bodies containing giant salvinia in Texas, Caddo Lake’s and Toledo Bend Reservoir’s giant salvinia infestations have required the most effort in the battle against invasive species in northeast Texas. Contractors sprayed over 2,700 and 3,300 acres of giant salvinia at Caddo Lake and Toledo Bend Reservoir, respectively, between April and August 2015. Additional spraying at both water bodies has been conducted in October and November.
- TPWD released 132,000 and 53,000 adult giant salvinia weevils in Caddo Lake and Toledo Bend Reservoir, respectively, during 2015. These weevils were either raised at TPWD greenhouse facilities in Jasper or collected from the existing weevil population at B. A. Steinhagen Reservoir.
- Lake Murvaul has small infestations of giant salvinia and water hyacinth. TPWD has been working closely with the controlling authority, Panola County Fresh Water Supply to manage these invasive species. Herbicide spraying has been conducted several times in 2015 to keep the coverage of these plants as low as possible.
- The partnerships developed among entities within the region have helped to minimize the impact invasive species are having at other area reservoirs. The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers at Lake O’ the Pines conducts inspections of boat ramps and boat trailers to identify any giant salvinia, or other invasives that may have been transported from another lake. TPWD has worked closely with the Corps and the Northeast Texas Municipal Water District to conduct surveys of other invasive species on Lake O’ the Pines and develop

management strategies to reduce their impact to the environment and folks that use the lake. The Corps and the water district funded herbicide treatment of water hyacinth and alligatorweed during 2015.

- TPWD successfully identified new giant salvinia infestations at Brandy Branch, Gilmer, and Lake Fork reservoirs. During routine invasive species inspections of boat ramps, biologists found that giant salvinia had been recently introduced by boaters. TPWD used floating containment booms to isolate plants to the boat ramp area and individual plants were physically removed and the area was sprayed with herbicide. Infestations were eliminated at Brandy Branch and Gilmer reservoirs. Containment booms were removed at Brandy Branch and Gilmer, but deployment continues at Lake Fork while the need for follow-up treatments persist.