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Alaskans can help prevent Elodea infestations

(Anchorage, AK) – State agencies are working together this summer on efforts to control the spread of Elodea, an invasive aquatic plant that is threatening fish habitat and recreational activities in certain lakes and slow-moving rivers in Southcentral Alaska and the Fairbanks area.

As part of these efforts, agencies are encouraging the general public to: report Elodea sightings; get involved in eradication efforts; and prevent the inadvertent spread of Elodea from their aquariums, boats and floatplanes. A detailed checklist on how Alaskans can identify and report Elodea is available at <http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/Index/ElodeaIdentificationandReporting.pdf>. For information on preventative measures, go to http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_Elodea.htm.

The public outreach on Elodea is a part of multi-agency effort in Alaska to control the spread of aquatic invasive species, which are estimated to cost the United States tens of billions of dollars each year in damages and spending on control measures. Additional invasive species that can impact waterways and have already arrived in Alaska include reed canarygrass, purple loosestrife, knotweed, red legged frogs and northern pike. Agencies are also watching out for potential invaders such as New Zealand mud snails and zebra and quagga mussels.

On January 15, 2013, the departments of Natural Resources, Fish and Game, and Environmental Conservation signed a memorandum of agreement addressing freshwater aquatic invasive plants and highlighting the importance of Elodea control. Each agency plays a vital role: DNR manages and permits activities in state waters and oversees the management of invasive weeds; ADFG manages the threat from aquatic invasive species; and DEC regulates the use of chemicals – if deemed appropriate and necessary – to control pests.

Working together with federal officials, the agencies have established an Elodea working group to set goals and identify specific actions to address infestations around the state. The working group had its first official meeting on Monday, June 24, in Anchorage to discuss and develop statewide priorities and goals for the management of Elodea.

Elodea has only been documented in 15 Alaska water bodies to date, but its foothold in floatplane lakes such as Sand Lake in Anchorage – three miles from Lake Hood, the state’s busiest floatplane base – makes it only one step away from invading any number of additional waters across the state.

So far, Elodea has been discovered in areas of Sand Lake, Little Campbell Lake, and Delong Lake in Anchorage, and Chena Slough in Fairbanks. It can also be found in a number of lakes and slow moving rivers/sloughs in locations including Cordova and the Kenai Peninsula.

“As a rower on Sand Lake since 1998, the recent exponential growth of Elodea has been shocking,” said Marietta “Ed” Hall, a founding member of the Anchorage Rowing Association.

Hall added, “When I pass over certain sections of the lake, Elodea snags my small, six-inch keel and nearly capsizes me. It’s obvious how damaging this weed will become to all users if it’s not controlled.”

“Elodea is believed to be Alaska’s first widespread aquatic invasive plant, but it won’t be the last if we do not start working together – and that includes educating and involving the public in prevention efforts,” said Brianne Blackburn, the Invasive Plants Coordinator for DNR’s Division of Agriculture.

For additional information regarding Elodea and other aquatic invasive species, please contact:

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