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APA: Milfoil chemical OK in Lake Luzerne

By DAYELIN ROMAN droman@poststar.com | Posted: Thursday, February 11, 2010 7:28 pm

RAY BROOK -- Adirondack Park Agency officials have approved Lake Luzerne's proposal to use a chemical to control Eurasian watermilfoil in the lake, marking the first time the agency will allow the use of a chemical to combat milfoil in the park.

"This could be the equivalent of the first cell tower in the Adirondacks," a member of the agency's Regulatory Programs Committee said during the Thursday morning meeting.

The town has proposed using about 1,560 pounds of triclopyr, also known by the brand name Renovate OTF, on some 11 acres on the southern bay of Lake Luzerne to control dense beds of milfoil, an invasive species that is a nuisance to swimmers and boaters, and kills off native plants.

Treatment is tentatively set for May.

During the treatment, a sequestering curtain will be placed on the opening separating the southern bay from the rest of the lake, and swimming will be prohibited for 3 hours after the 72-hour treatment window.

Using lake water for irrigation purposes will be banned for a minimum of 120 days or until triclopyr levels have dropped below 1 part per billion, the APA permit states.

Officials said drinking water is not a concern, since water from Lake Luzerne is not used for drinking.

Triclopyr was first used in Saratoga Lake in 2008 after being approved by the state in 2007. Its use on Lake Luzerne will mark the first time an aquatic herbicide is approved for use in the Adirondack Park.

Lake Luzerne Town Supervisor Gene Merlino said the herbicide is necessary because previously approved milfoil control methods such as hand harvesting can't keep up with the invasive species' growth, and a benthic barrier is too costly.

Merlino said he and a group called Aquatic Control Technologies have been working on managing milfoil in Lake Luzerne for three years.

"It's the best thing that can happen to our county, our town and all lakes in the jurisdiction of the APA," Merlino said after the approval on Thursday.

The project has also been approved by the Department of Environmental Conservation.

But Jay Westerveld, a Warwick, N.Y., resident who is trying to keep herbicides away from Glenmere Lake in the Hudson River Valley, said the DEC's approval is tarnished by a conflict of interest.

Westerveld said a DEC engineer who oversees the use of herbicides in lakes, Scott Kishbaugh, also sits on the board of a nonprofit group financially supported by Renovate's manufacturer.

"It's very troubling and a severe conflict of interest," Westerveld said.

Merlino discounted the assertions, and said he and others in town have worked hard to get the proposal approved.

"We've been working for three years," he said. "It's been checked and double-checked. He probably doesn't live near this lake."

The APA approved the chemical despite opposition from the Adirondack Council. The group asked the APA for a public hearing before considering granting the proposal due to concerns of how the Renovate OTF would affect native plants.

The APA's stamp of approval could also effect Lake George's milfoil removal efforts, said Peter Bauer, the executive director of the Fund for Lake George.

An application to use Sonar on Lake George to combat the plant several years ago was denied by the agency, but officials said Thursday that triclopyr is safer and more effective at killing milfoil than Sonar.

Bauer said he's not sure the same chemical could be successful on Lake George, a much larger lake with an inconsistent water flow.

"I think the jury's still out on the use of herbicides," he said. "The park agency is taking a look at whether or not this chemical has potential to be useful. We'll see. I know there are a lot of people watching this closely."

Merlino said the approval is the culmination of collaborative efforts between private citizens and government and is one step toward controlling the invasive plant.

"It's going to be like cutting the grass," he said. "Once we get the weeds out of there, we gotta mow the lawn."

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