

## Milfoil battle plan subject of meeting

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06/28/04  
*Bonner County Daily Bee*

*Some residents oppose the use of chemicals*

SANDPOINT -- Bonner County's battle plan for dealing with the noxious weed Eurasian milfoil will be the subject of a public meeting on Wednesday.

The meeting is scheduled for 6 p.m. at the Sandpoint Community Hall.

The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the county's plan to use a systemic herbicide to attack dense infestations at Lake Pend Oreille's Ellisport Bay. Chemical applications are also planned for the Pend Oreille River at Thama Slough and Memorial Park in Sandpoint.

The county planned to use Renovate, which contains the active ingredient triclopyr, to attack milfoil the colonies last month. But the plan was put on hold to let the infestations flourish.

"They needed to be bigger," said Leslie Marshall, director of the county Weed Department. "They were too small, too short, and it wouldn't have impacted the plants well enough."

But as the county bided its time, residents opposed to the use of herbicides in the lake and river launched a campaign to block the county's plans. Peaceful protests and petition drives were organized to generate support for alternative methods of dealing with the prolific weed.

Meantime, county officials reset dates for applying the chemical. Marshall said the county has approval to use Renovate from July 12-23. Weather will influence exactly which days within that period the chemical is applied.

Bright orange signs will denote application areas and people within a quarter-mile are advised not to draw their drinking water out of the lake for at least five days.

A representative from Cepro, the chemical company that manufactures Renovate, is expected to attend Wednesday's meeting to answer people's questions about the product and its usage.

Marshall said if there is an overwhelming outcry over the battle plan, the county might consider abandoning it. However, she added that most of the comments she's heard have been favorable.

"The people that are actually having trouble with it are really people that have trouble with chemical spraying of any sort. I can tell you the people who live on the water who have milfoil problems are all in favor of this. We have many more phone calls from those people about what we're going to do with milfoil versus 'Why are you doing this?'" said Marshall.

But opponents of the plan want the county to consider biological or mechanical methods of beating back milfoil.

"I'm going to let them know, 'Hey guys, if you put this stuff in our water, you are going to be hurting our children. Bottom line,'" said Clark Fork resident Jacqueline Smith.

Smith said there is a significant body of evidence against using chemical approaches. In addition, some landowners contend they were never notified of the county's intentions.

"I don't see why, with all the money we're spending, we couldn't hire county workers to hand-pull," she said.

Last year, the county hired divers and a suction dredge to assault the weeds. But that method costs up to \$800 an acre, compared to the \$100/acre cost of using Renovate, according to Marshall.

One thing the county won't do is nothing, said Marcia Phillips, who chairs the county commission.

"Ignoring it is certainly not going to work. The negative economic impacts to this community would be astronomical," said Phillips, who worries the county is losing ground battle against milfoil.

But Phillips remains open to ideas that will work.

"If they have a suggestion of an alternative method that's effective, I would like to hear it," she said.