

Group drawing a bead on Cocolalla milfoil

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Meeting set for Oct. 25

SANDPOINT -- The Cocolalla Lake Association is holding a meeting next month to discuss the spread of Eurasian milfoil and ways of beating back the prolific aquatic weed.

The meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Oct. 25 at the Southside School gym. Bonner County noxious weed officials and members of the Idaho Milfoil Task Force are slated to give presentations. A question-and-answer session is also planned.

Cary Poston, a member of the lake association's milfoil committee, estimates 50-60 acres of the 800-acre lake are infested with Eurasian milfoil, which has a rich legacy of degrading fish habitat, hindering boat navigation and snarling swimming areas.

Poston is rallying landowners and others who have an interest in the watershed to help come up with a way of addressing the problem before it's too late.

"I just think the consequences of letting it go would be too grim," he said.

There are thick infestations at the north and south ends of the lake, and clumps of the weed can also be found in many near-shore areas, said Poston. The association plans to use a Global Positioning System device to bring the amount of infestation into to sharper focus before the Oct. 25 meeting.

No decisions have been made regarding how to do battle with the infestations in Cocolalla Lake. Poston said both chemical and non-chemical methods are up for consideration.

Regardless of which methods are employed, the effort will likely cost thousands of dollars. The association and the county are identifying grant funding options and the group hopes landowners will be willing to donate some of their own money to the cause.

"We want to get a grasp on this before it costs a half-million to fix," said Poston.

Leslie Marshall, director of Bonner County Solid Waste, Parks and Recreation and Weeds, said the county is offering to write a cost-share grant for the association so it can secure funding from the Selkirk weed management cooperative, a group which tackles noxious weed issues in Idaho's two northern counties, Montana's Sanders and Lincoln counties, Washington's Pend Oreille County and two Canadian provinces.

Marshall said she is encouraged by the Cocolalla Lake Association's initiative in dealing with milfoil.

"They have really taken the lead. They want to do something about this," Marshall said.