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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 2, 2014

Elodea found in remote Mat-Su lake

DNR seeking public input on recreational use of impacted waterways

(Anchorage, AK) – Elodea, an invasive freshwater aquatic plant known to threaten fish habitat, disrupt recreational activities, and lower property values, has recently been found in Alexander Lake in Southcentral Alaska. This is the first confirmed infestation of *Elodea* in the Matanuska-Susitna Basin, and as a result, the number of infested lakes and slow-moving rivers in Alaska has grown to 18. Infestations have previously been discovered in Fairbanks, Cordova, Anchorage, and the Kenai Peninsula.

Elodea spreads easily. Its leafy stems detach from the parent plant, float away, root, and start new plants. Even small fragments of *Elodea* have the potential to start a new infestation. This popular aquarium plant can arrive via the dumping of aquariums and hitchhike to new waters on boats, trailers, float planes, and other recreational equipment. Remote locations such as Alexander Lake are not immune to the impacts of *Elodea*.



Known Locations of Elodea in Alaska



Source: UAA Alaska Natural Heritage Program and the Department of Natural Resources, 2014.

When it arrives in a new waterbody, *Elodea* grows rapidly, overtaking native plants and filling the water column with thick vegetative mats that can degrade fish habitat, foul boat propellers and floatplane rudders, impede paddling and boat launching, navigation, and fishing.

State agencies and other stakeholders are working together to understand the scope of *Elodea* infestations in Alaska, and DNR has initiated a survey of recreational users to help prioritize future *Elodea* surveys in state water bodies (See survey details below).

Efforts are underway to stop Elodea's spread and control infestations throughout Alaska. Eradication efforts through herbicide treatment to three Kenai Peninsula lakes began in the spring of 2014. Multiple agencies in Fairbanks are exploring the feasibility of mechanical control in the Chena Slough, while other groups in Anchorage, Mat-Su, and Cordova are mapping out comprehensive management plans and surveying high-risk waterbodies.

Alexander Lake is only accessible in the summer via boat or floatplane. "This recent discovery of Elodea in the lake illustrates how recreational equipment can introduce this invasive plant to remote freshwater and fish habitat," said DNR Invasive Weeds Coordinator Brianne Blackburn. She noted that collaborative efforts are underway to stop Elodea's spread and control infestations with the goal to eradicate new and established populations.

The public can play an important role in preventing additional waterbodies from becoming infested and also help document infestations by the following:

1. Take the following steps to prevent the spread of Elodea when traveling in and between water bodies:

Boaters: Avoid disturbing heavily vegetated areas by not motoring through them.

Decontaminate your equipment: CLEAN, DRAIN, DRY!

- Clean: Carefully inspect and remove any visible aquatic plants/fragments from your boat and trailer before leaving the waterbody.
- Drain: Allow water to drain from livewells, bilge tanks, and dispose of water from all tanks that hold lake/stream water, including coolers, before launching at your next site.
- Dry: Allow your boat, trailer, and all equipment time to dry completely before you go to another waterbody.

Float planes operators:

- Before entering the aircraft remove visible plants and pump water from floats.
- Before takeoff avoid taxiing through heavy plant growth; raise and lower rudders.
- After takeoff raise and lower rudders to free plant fragments while over the waters you are leaving or over land.

2. Home and School Aquarium Owners: Don't let it loose! Dispose of all aquatic plants like Elodea properly by sealing in a plastic bag and placing in the trash. An emergency quarantine has been issued by DNR which prohibits the importation or distribution of Elodea and four other species of priority aquatic invasive plants. Find more information about the quarantine at:

<http://www.plants.alaska.gov/pdf/ExteriorQuarantineofAquaticInvasiveWeeds.pdf>

3. Report sightings. Documenting infestations is the first step in controlling or eradicating Elodea. Understanding where Elodea occurs allows us to prevent inadvertent transport to non-infested waters. If you find or suspect Elodea:

- Note location (GPS or mark on map) and water depth/clarity.

- Take a specimen (photo at a minimum) and include as much of the entire plant as you can, including the tiny flower on a long thin stalk, if present. Put the sample in a zip lock bag, book, or wax paper and store in a cool place.
- Call the Alaska Department of Fish and Game invasive species hotline: 1-877-INVASIV or report to Brianne Blackburn, Invasive Weeds and Agricultural Pest Coordinator: Brianne.Blackburn@alaska.gov / 907-745-4469
- Check out this flyer for more information on how to identify Elodea and how to report it: <http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/Index/ElodeaIdentificationandReporting.pdf>
- Check out what Elodea looks like underwater: https://www.flickr.com/photos/usfws_alaska/14868302680/

4. Help DNR better understand how Elodea spreads and what areas are at high risk. DNR is collecting voluntary data about the movement of recreational equipment between potentially impacted waterways. If you travel between any of known locations (see map above) via boat or float plane and would like to participate in the survey, please follow the link below. All information is anonymous and will help prioritize future Elodea surveys.

Survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/AlaskaElodea>

Preventing new infestations is the cheapest, most effective and best option because controlling/eradicating Elodea infestations is expensive and difficult. “If we act quickly there is a very good chance that we can eradicate Elodea from many infested waterbodies and spare Alaska from the same fate as other states currently implementing costly annual control methods,” Blackburn said.

To receive updates on Elodea eradication efforts in Anchorage and throughout the state please sign up at <http://list.state.ak.us/soalists/AnchorageElodeaManagement/jl.htm>.

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