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CONTACT:

Andrea LaMoreaux, Vice President, NH LAKES

603-226-0299

alamoreaux@nhlakes.org

www.nhlakes.org

Lake Host and Boater Work Together to ‘Save’ Lake Waukewan!

Invasive European water chestnut found trying to hitch a ride into the recreationally popular lake and town water supply

Concord, N.H., August 1, 2018: Thanks to the efforts of a Lake Host and a boater earlier this summer, Lake Waukewan in Meredith was saved from the introduction of an invasive plant that could have caused serious harm. During the early evening hours on Friday, July 20, while conducting a courtesy inspection of a boat that was about to be launched into the lake, the Lake Host on duty found and removed a European water chestnut seed that was attached to the underside of the boat trailer. Lake Waukewan is the public drinking water supply for the Town of Meredith and it provides a variety of recreational opportunities for local residents and visitors.

The European water chestnut is an invasive aquatic plant inadvertently released into waters of the Northeast in the late 1800s, which has been slowly spreading from waterbody to waterbody, becoming a significant nuisance in areas of the Nashua and Connecticut Rivers in New Hampshire. The plant can quickly form nearly impenetrable floating mats of vegetation which create a hazard for boaters and others recreating in the water. The density of the mats can severely limit light penetration into the water reducing the growth of beneficial native aquatic plants. The reduced plant growth, combined with the decomposition of the water chestnut plants which die back each year, can result in reduced levels of oxygen in the water, impacting aquatic organisms and potentially causing fish kills.

“Water chestnut seeds have sharp barbs which help them spread from waterbody to waterbody, particularly by attaching to the carpeted bunks of trailers,” commented Andrea LaMoreaux, NH LAKES Vice President. “In addition, these spiny seeds, once in the water, can result in puncture injuries to people swimming or wading.”

While the boater didn’t know exactly when and where the trailer picked up the water chestnut seed, it’s likely that it could have started growing once in Lake Waukewan. Studies have shown that water chestnut seeds that have been out of the water for nearly 12 years can sprout when introduced back into the water.

“If I hadn’t bent way down to thoroughly inspect the underside of the boat and trailer, I would have missed it” commented the Lake Host on duty at the time, a volunteer from the local community. “The boater was surprised to see the seed and went to a local car wash to give the boat and trailer a thorough rinsing. Ultimately, the boater decided not to launch into the lake that night.”

Since 2002, thousands of individuals trained by NH LAKES as Lake Hosts have taught boaters how to prevent the spread of invasive plants and animals from lake to lake by always taking time to clean, drain, and dry their boat, trailer, and gear between waterbodies. During the program’s 16-year history, Lake Hosts have found and removed 1,573 specimens of invasive species that were hitchhiking on a boat or trailer that was about to enter or had just been taken out of a lake. Infestations of invasive species degrade the health and enjoyment of lakes, are difficult and expensive to control, and are nearly impossible to get rid of once they are well-established in lakes.

NH LAKES is the only statewide, member-supported nonprofit organization working to keep New Hampshire’s lakes clean and healthy, now and in the future. The organization works with partners, promote clean water policies and responsible use, and inspires the public to care for our lakes. For more information, visit www.nhlakes.org, email info@nhlakes.org, or call 603.226.0299.

Photo 1: The European water chestnut seed has spiny barbs that help it attach to boats and trailers.

Photo 2: The European water chestnut can quickly form impenetrable floating mats of vegetation which create hazards for boaters and others recreating in the water. (Photo credit: US Fish and Wildlife Service)

Photo 3: NH LAKES Logo