



David Lane/Union Leader

ART GRINDLE, urban ponds restoration coordinator for the city of Manchester, holds Brazilian elodea, a water weed that is threatening to clog Nutt's Pond in Manchester.

State targeting exotic plants

■ The DES is looking to enforce a law barring the importation of 14 potentially dangerous plants into the state.

By **STEPHEN SEITZ**
Union Leader Correspondent

ANTRIM — Dealers in exotic aquatic plants beware: the Department of Environmental Services is watching your weeds.

"We want to prevent another milfoil crisis," said DES public information coordinator Charles Knox.

"We've had eight enforcement actions in the last week," said Jody Connor, who directs the state's exotic aquatic weed eradication program.

In 1998, responding to the spread of milfoil in New Hampshire's lakes and ponds, the state passed a law barring the importation of 14 potentially dangerous plants into the state.

One of those plants has "taken over" Nutt's Pond in Manchester, Connor said.

Pet store owners and suppliers all over New England were sent a letter after the 1998 law passed, Connor said, but it wasn't enough. Last week, Empire Pets in Antrim was visited by an inspector, who confiscated some plants and issued a citation.

"We had no notification from the state," said owner Jane Pelletier. "We're licensed by the state, and they never told us."

"We don't know what happened to the letters," Connor said.

"weed watchers" program to encourage people to know and recognize exotic water weeds and report suspicious species to the authorities.

Pelletier said a state inspector came into the shop on Thursday, while her daughter was in charge of the store. The inspector took plants used by tropical fish for feed and foliage.

"Of course, we wouldn't sell them if we knew they were illegal," Pelletier said.

Pelletier said the plants came from Central Mass Aquatics, a Massachusetts distributor. The owner was not available for comment yesterday.

There are 14 aquatic weeds barred from importation into New Hampshire: two varieties of milfoil, fanwort, verticillata, water chestnut, parrot feather, curly leaf pondweed, purple loosestrife, the common reed, frog bit, flowering rush, European naiad, yellow floating heart and Brazilian elodea.

The latter is a lush, leafy plant popular with tropical fish owners because it provides habitat for their fish. But outside of the aquarium, it can cause problems.

"Brazilian elodea has taken over Nutt's Pond in Manchester," Connor said of the pond in south Manchester between South Willow Street and the Boston and Maine railroad tracks. "It could be a very big problem if it gets out."

The problem with some exotic plants, Connor said, is that they have no natural predators. That means they are free to grow unchecked. With nothing

ate to the point where they overwhelm all the native life in a pond.

The Brazilian elodea's success came as a surprise, Connor said.

"We thought it would be frozen out in the winter, but it came back in force," he said, "and it's taken over Nutt's Pond."

These exotic plants can do some real damage, Connor added.

"Property values around some of these water bodies have dropped as much as 15 percent," said Connor. "You can't swim, you can't fish, you can't boat. Swimmers have drowned because of these plants."

All it takes to start a problem is someone dumping an aquarium into a lake or pond, Connor said, a possible way milfoil was introduced into New Hampshire's lakes.

"Maybe they got tired of the fish, or the fish died, and they dumped the aquarium out," he said.

There are 52 New Hampshire bodies of water known to be infested with milfoil, which has been moving into the state since the 1960s, along with fanwort.

For aquarium owners who've given up the hobby, Connor advises not dumping the aquarium and its contents into local bodies of water.

"Don't throw it into the water," he said. "Dry it out in the hot sun."

For more information on the aquatic weed control program, visit the department Web site at



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