

Press Republican
February 11, 2010

APA backs herbicide for Lake Luzerne

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ALBANY — Adirondack Park Agency regulators have proposed approving the use of an herbicide for the first time in a lake in the 6 million-acre park.

The agency's board on Thursday will consider its staff's recommendation for treating 11 acres of Lake Luzerne in the southern Adirondacks to kill Eurasian watermilfoil.

Most public comments have favored using the herbicide to get rid of the plant, agency spokesman Keith McKeever said.

"There's quite a bit of it, and it's clogging up the lake."

But environmentalists oppose the plan, saying the herbicide Triclopyr, used elsewhere, has killed other plants. They also questioned whether a proposed 275-foot sequestering barrier will protect the rest of the lake.

"Places we're seeing, like Saratoga Lake, it's killing all sorts of plants that shouldn't be eradicated at the same time," said John Sheehan, spokesman for the Adirondack Council.

The group requested a public hearing, said chemicals should be a last resort and urged the state regulators to review whether non-toxic alternatives were fully explored before granting a permit to the Town of Lake Luzerne to apply the chemical this spring.

An APA staff report said that after the 72-hour treatment with 1,560 pounds of the chemical, the Triclopyr concentrations in that area are expected to drop within two to three weeks to less than 50 parts per billion, below the state restriction for drinkable water.

An irrigation ban would remain in effect for at least 120 days or until concentrations fall below one part per billion.

The APA Board is to consider the effects on wetlands, the significance of the first-time use, the possible effect on protected plants and the staff recommendation for conditional approval.

The agency administers the Freshwater Wetlands Act within the park, where more than half the land is privately owned. The agency advises hand harvesting of nuisance plants and requires a permit for pesticide use or mechanical removal to clear large areas.