

Geneva Lake and Starry Stonewort

First discovered in an isolated location within a lagoon on Geneva Lake, starry stonewort is now known to exist in two additional locations near the lagoon. This non-native invasive is a new exotic macro-algae that is threatening lakes in the Midwest. Identified in only 15 Wisconsin lakes so far, efforts are being made at the local and state level to better understand this plant and to improve methods of managing it.

The present approach to managing starry stonewort in Geneva Lake focuses on containing it and controlling its spread. Two chemical treatments in the lagoon during 2019 were unsuccessful, having little significant impact on the lagoon's population. Growing samples of starry stonewort were identified in the lagoon as early as April 2020 this spring. Although the GLEA will not be using chemical treatments in the lagoon to control starry stonewort, the Trinke Property Owners Association has secured a permit to chemically treat the lagoon for aquatic plants during the summer of 2020.

The Geneva Lake Environmental Agency's approach to controlling starry stonewort is four-pronged. First, to address the existing populations of starry stonewort, a dive team has been contracted to hand pull starry stonewort during the second week of July. Although several management options have been tried at different lakes, hand pulling has shown the most promise.

The second effort is the inventory of the plant community to quantify the existence of starry stonewort in Geneva Lake. A lake-wide comprehensive lake plant survey will again be conducted during the summer of 2020.

The third effort to control starry stonewort is to keep the lake, lake bottom, and aquatic plant community healthy. Geneva Lake has a very diverse and rich aquatic plant community. If left alone it can do a pretty good job dealing with invasive non-native aquatic plants. Geneva Lake has had several non-native aquatic species for years. Because the lake is healthy and the plant community has not been disturbed by dredging, chemical treatment or shading, these non-native aquatic plants have been held in check and have not become a major problem. This approach should be continued.

The fourth component to our starry stonewort management is to keep it from being transported into, around, and out of Geneva Lake. Under the state-wide Clean Boat, Clean Waters boat inspection program, the GLEA has hired four boat inspectors to work the public municipal launches on Geneva Lake. These inspectors not only inspect the boats as they come and go, but they interact with boaters, educating them about how they must clean their boats, anchors, trailers, bait buckets, live wells, and bilge water when they leave a lake and go to another lake. Boaters are instructed to leave it all, taking nothing from one lake to another. As of the second week of June over 155 hours have been put in working with over 850 boaters at the five different Geneva Lake municipal launches.

When it comes down to it, only lake users can prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species in our lakes. Keep your boat, trailer, car, anchor, bilge, bait bucket, and live well clean. Take nothing living from one lake to another. You never know what you're transporting, especially if it is so small you can't see it.