



2008 DNR Visit Report

On February 20, 2008, Jeff Burke, Jill Wilm and Paul Specht of the Van Vliet Lake Association Board paid a visit to the Rhinelander DNR Service Center to meet with Kevin Gauthier to get some answers to questions about aquatic plant issues on Van Vliet Lake and what courses of action may be available for shore land property owners to address these issues. Kevin Gauthier is the Lake Coordinator for six counties and deals primarily with Lake Protection Grants, Aquatic Plant Management, Water Quality surveys and AIS (aquatic invasive species) issues. First, and most importantly it is the DNR's position that "(the) cutting of weeds is plant degradation and has no ecological benefits. It is never done for biological reasons, it is only human-use driven. Weeds are important for absorbing nutrients, cutting down on algae growth and keeping silt and sediment in check. Cutting favors the plants that are the most nuisance and can open up the door to AIS."

The DNR's negative opinions on weed cutting notwithstanding, we asked what legal procedures were necessary and available for weed removal whether hand or mechanical. Without a permit, any lakeshore property owner may hand remove (rake) an area up to 30' by 150'. This area allowance may not be subdivided or applied to more than one area of shoreline according to the DNR rep. Mechanical cutting of any type requires permitting and there are fees involved. The DNR rep. took the position that multiple individual requests for mechanical cutting on a lake would be arbitrarily denied based on the volume of areas disturbed. It was also his opinion that no such remedy would be available in the near future unless the lake had secured permission through the DNR via an approved weed management plan and an approved harvesting plan.

The DNR would like to work toward issuing one master permit to a lake for weed management. This requires a weed inventory conducted by a DNR approved agency. The Van Vliet survey, which was completed in 2004, as part of a Lake Management plan, no longer meets the criteria required by the DNR and so a new weed survey must be accomplished. Fortunately, due to the efforts of the Presque Isle Town Lakes Committee, such a survey will be accomplished this year and Van Vliet Lake will be receiving documentation which will lead to an approved Weed Management plan and will also allow the VVLA Board to apply for future funds to combat AIS should it occur here.

With a qualifying weed management plan in place, the DNR could allow the clearing of channels to the main body of the lake. Under no conditions is the practice of herbicide or aquacide use legal on native plants. The DNR also believes in focusing efforts to control sources of nutrients to the lake. Septic systems are only part of the problem - runoff from cleared shorelines can present a bigger issue.

It is up to the majority opinion of lakeshore owners whether we pursue an advanced weed control program. To recap the DNR's message, cutting is not recommended but the creation of an aquatic plants management plan on a whole lake basis is an important step. A management plan makes recommendations to promote a healthy, diverse community of aquatic plants. This may include protection of native plants in some areas, measures to prevent the introduction of invasive species, methods to continue patterns of recreational use that have been historically present in a lake, or rehabilitation efforts to control an imbalance in the plant community.