



OREGON INVASIVE SPECIES COUNCIL

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

INVISIBLE MENACE AT OREGON'S DOORSTEP

SALEM, Oregon—It is no wonder *Hydrilla verticillata*, known commonly as Hydrilla, is on Oregon's 100 Worst List of invasive species and is Oregon's featured Invasive Species of Month in September (<http://www.oregon.gov/OISC/>). The plant, also known as water thyme, is a freshwater plant with whorls of leaves. That sounds innocent enough, until you realize the submersed plant grows up to 25 feet long and forms dense mats in all types of water, including tidal areas. It's not very visible to people as it grows from the bottom of a waterway up to one inch a day, finally forming dense mats at the surface. At that point, the water body is literally choked with the plant.

The perennial needs water to survive, reproducing by regrowing fragments of its stem, or by potato-like tubers. To those that think this sounds like great fish-rearing habitat, think again. One Hydrilla tuber can make more than 6,000 new tubers in a square meter plot. In other words, it chokes out everything — including healthy native water plants such as pondweeds — as it colonizes springs, lakes, ditches, rivers, and estuaries.

And it doesn't need pristine water bodies, either. It flourishes in low and high nutrient water, shallow or deep water, low and high temperature conditions, and even in partial seawater. And because it can also grow in low light conditions, it has a leg up on many native plants, which don't start to grow until adequate light conditions exist.

There are two aquatic plants in Oregon that look similar to Hydrilla and are often mistaken for this invader—American water weed (*Elodea Canadensis*), which has smooth leaves in whorls of three around the stem (Hydrilla has heavily serrated leaves in whorls of four to eight around the stem), and the related non-native weed Egeria or Brazilian Elodea (*Egeria densa*), which has minutely serrated leaves arranged in whorls of four to five.

Although both are the same species, there are two types of Hydrilla. One type has only female flowers, and it originated from India. The other type has both male and female flowers, and likely came from Korea. Hydrilla plagues the East and West Coasts, from Florida to Connecticut, west to California and Washington. Most of the plants in the United States are the type that originated in India, although both types have been found.

Because of how it spread over time, scientists believe Hydrilla entered the United States in Florida as an aquarium plant in the 1950s. It took only two decades for it to become firmly established throughout that state. The version with the female only flowers was introduced to the Potomac Basin years later.

Despite the fact that this plant is on the U.S. Federal Noxious Weed List, it is still available for sale by aquarium supply dealers and via the Internet, making the chance for its spread throughout the United States likely. Trailered boats are also a key vector for this species, driving messages from states throughout the country to “clean, drain, and dry your boat.” Launching only a clean boat is one way to prevent the transfer of this plant from one location to another.

And the cost to Oregon if this plant were to become established here? In dollars — millions. Simply to maintain this plant at tolerable levels in Florida, the state spends millions annually on herbicides and harvesters that remove the vegetation. In personnel time and effort — irrigation and flood control districts battle this species daily as culverts and pump stations become clogged. Lakes are drained to expose the plants to air, and Chinese grass carp have been introduced because they favor Hydrilla as a food. But introduced carp come with their own set of problems. And in recreation — Hydrilla affects recreational and commercial boating, and prevents swimming and fishing. In addition, the mere existence of the plant limits the weight and size of sportfish. In ecosystem functioning — Hydrilla infestations can alter water chemistry and oxygen levels.

What can we do in Oregon? Clean, drain, and dry boats before launching into new water bodies. Be on the lookout for this species. And if you suspect you have seen Hydrilla, report it at 1-866-INVADER or online at www.oregoninvasiveshotline.org.

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The Oregon Invasive Species Council was established by the Oregon Legislature in 2002. Its mission is to conduct a coordinated and comprehensive effort to keep invasive species out of Oregon and to eliminate, reduce, or mitigate the impacts of invasive species already established in Oregon. Current members of the council hail from the Oregon Marine Board, USDA Forest Service, USDA-Animal Plant Health Inspection Service, The Nature Conservancy, Dow Agrosiences, DLF International, Wallowa Resources, Port of Portland, and SOLV. In addition, agency representatives include Portland State University, Oregon Department of Forestry, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Sea Grant, Oregon Department of Agriculture, and Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

Information for this release came from the Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants at the University of Florida.