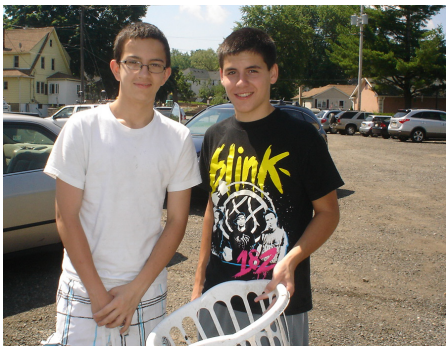
Pond and Lake Management Part V: Making Your Water Chestnut Hand Pulling Event a Success: How to Coordinate a Volunteer Effort to Remove Water Chestnut by Hand Pulling

Fact Sheet FS1138







Cooperative Extension

Pat Rector, Environmental and Resource Management Agent

Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Morris County

Water chestnut is an aquatic invasive species that has begun to impact waterbodies in New Jersey. Water chestnut is loosely bound in the sediment and hand pulling can be an effective management measure in areas where a mechanical harvester cannot reach, or where chemical treatment is not a preferred option. Hand pulling can be as simple as it sounds; you visually survey the area, document the invasive locations, and pull the invasive out of the lake by hand. A large volunteer pool is usually available as anglers, boaters, lake organizations, and the general public often lose their ability to recreate on their lake when there is a water chestnut infestation. Volunteers are frequently eager to help clean up their lake as the impact of the invasive is immediately obvious to them and their volunteer efforts will be seen immediately.

In order to achieve your goal of removing water chestnut, the hand pulling event needs to be well thought out. This will ensure that volunteers receive the greatest rewards: the satisfaction of a job well done and the knowledge that they have contributed to improving their lake environment. A volunteer may become frustrated if they show up at an event and are not given clear guidance, if they are unqualified for the job they are asked to perform, or if there are either too many or too few volunteers for the job.

Event Planning

Remember that for an event to go smoothly, adequate planning should be done beforehand. A two to three hour hand pulling event may require two to three months of coordinated planning.

- **Organize a planning team.** Even if there are only a few people to organize the hand pulling event.
- **Set Goals.** The goal may be dependent upon the number of volunteers and may need to remain flexible.
- **Select a date.** Check on other activities/events in the area that might coordinate well together (Earth Day, Township Day, Lake Day), or that might conflict with your event. Try to avoid major holidays, holiday weekends and events like the opening day of the fishing or hunting season.
- **Develop a calendar working from the date of the event backwards.** Start with the event date and detail the tasks required. For each task determine the due date and if there are any prerequisites. For example, if the flyer needs to be at the printers by May 15th, then it would be required to be developed, reviewed, revised and approved prior to that date. Setting a due date for each component allows for the final deadline to be met. An electronic spreadsheet often facilitates the overall viewing of all tasks and allows for e-mail transfers and updates.

Planning Roles That Should be Covered

- Recruitment and orientation of volunteers
- Safety/first aid
- Boats
- Waste disposal. You should know in advance where you are going to dispose of the plant material and document it in a Waste Disposal Plan
- Public relations/communication
- Parking/site responsibility

RUTGERS
New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
88 Lipman Drive, New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8525
Phone: 732.932.5000

- Funding/equipment/refreshments.
- Invite public officials and provide press releases to the local and regional papers. Public officials should be invited well ahead of time, the earlier you ask, the greater the chance of participation. Extend the invitation and be clear if you are asking them to participate as a boater, or speak outside or inside, and the groups that are invited to attend. Make sure press releases are clear and that there is a follow up with the local press.

A) Recruitment and Orientation of Volunteers

Timing is key. Hand pulling events are typically conducted in the summer, usually June through July. Volunteer hand pulling events are frequently held on weekends. There are various methods for promoting your event and a combination may be helpful; press releases, newsletters, e-mail lists, town websites, Facebook© and other social networks, and good old fashioned word of mouth are some avenues to reach your audience. Reach out to residents, employees of nearby businesses, schools, church groups, environmental and outdoor groups, boating and fishing enthusiasts, Boy and Girl Scout Troops, community associations, local Environmental Commissions, and town boards. The request for volunteers should provide people with the date, time, place, a contact name and number, and why their assistance is needed. People want to know that what they are doing matters.

C) Boats and Safety

- A site visit should be conducted prior to the event to look for potential safety issues, and then again the day before or the day of the event
- Ensure there are safety boats. Assistance may be available from State Park, local fire safety boats, or State Police.
- Establish a safety plan. This should include the location of the nearest hospital, important phone numbers, and maps/directions to a hospital. Volunteer coordinator or team leaders should know where the first aid kits are located. Notify the local police of the event in advance
- Waivers should be signed by volunteers. Check with your lake association or organization sponsoring the event as to whether to use a generic waiver form or specific to an insurance policy.
- Provide a brief safety session prior to boaters taking to the water, reminding everyone of distress signals and other safety measures.
- Have a boat list with the registration. This provides a way to keep track of the volunteers in each boat and what area of the lake they are located (For example, Jane Al-Ebus is in the silver canoe/red stripe at the north end of the lake). This provides a safety measure and later you have a list of the volunteers in each area for data verification.

B) Volunteer Job Descriptions

These "jobs" will be assigned well in advance of the hand pulling event. Prior to the event the jobs and responsible volunteer should be confirmed.

Job	Skills	Time Commitment	Number of Volunteers Needed
Coordination of the overall event (Coordinator)			
Coordination of the volunteers (sign-ups, orientations, safety,)			
Volunteer Coordinator			If there are sufficient numbers of volunteers, you may think about breaking into teams and having team leaders who report to the volunteer coordinator.
Development of maps of the lake			
Parking management			
Transportation of weeds to disposal site			
Cooking/assistant cooks			
Public relations			
Public safety person			
Historian/environmental scientist/ ecologist/limnologist			
Manning the registration desk			
Hand pulling water chestnut			

As people return, make sure the registration table marks them as having returned.

- Everyone should have a life vest or Personal Flotation Device (PFD) and it should be on them and properly secured. No one can go on the water without one.
- Determine what type of boats will be used in advance when scouting your access locations. This can be documented on a map of the lake ahead of time. A kayak will allow for more volunteers on the water and can move into even heavily weeded areas, but may only be able to carry small loads before having to unload. A canoe will be able to carry a larger amount of water chestnut if unloading is not available nearby. Laundry baskets are a common gathering tool; they are light-weight, inexpensive, durable, drain well, and easy to handle. Laundry baskets can be secured to the kayak with bungee cords or can be attached to a floating inner tube.

D) Funding/Equipment/Refreshments

If you let community businesses know what you are doing, and why, you may be surprised at the positive response. Boat rentals may be made available for no or reduced cost, as well as food and drinks for your volunteers. Check to see if a local business will supply t-shirts and design them for the event. Be sure to give credit to all supporters. Seek small funding opportunities from various organizations including boating organizations to help fund print costs or some administrative assistance.

E) Waste Disposal- Develop Disposal Plan

Check with the local and county recycling coordinator to determine the appropriate method to dispose of the water chestnut removed from your lake. A list of municipal and county recycling coordinators can be found on the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection website www.state.nj.us/dep/dshw/recycling/recycoor.htm. Make sure the disposal plan includes how you will collect the water chestnut and how it will be transported. If the hand pulling event will be conducted on the week-end verify availability of disposal site or make alternate plans until Monday. If you will be bringing the removed water chestnut to a municipal or county facility ask for a donation of the disposal cost.

The Event

The volunteer coordinating the event should arrive at least an hour before the event to set up and put signs along the way to guide volunteers. Parking should be set up also at this time. The photographer should be on-site and pictures should be taken often during the event. Pictures tell a great story and can be put on website to attract people for future hand pulling events.

Registration Desk

- The registration desk should be well manned during the time when volunteers will be signing up.
- Greet public officials and be sure to allow them an opportunity to provide comments. Greet the press. Have the local expert or ecologists each provide a brief introductory talk about the waterbody characteristics/history and water chestnut impacts. Volunteers like to know about the area where they are working. Even volunteers from the surrounding area may not be aware of some of the history despite the fact they drive past every day.

At The Registration Desk	Volunteer Packet Should Include
Volunteer packets (see text insert to the right).	A good picture (waterproof) of water chestnut (floating leaves and the entire plant with submerged leaves).
A large poster size picture of water chestnut with labels.	An Acknowledgement of Risk Statement that should be signed and returned.
A live specimen in water (clear storage bin if possible).	Map (waterproof if possible) of the lake with area for handpull clearly indicated and put out areas indicated also.
Sign-in sheet with Boat List.	Work gloves
Laundry baskets.	Pencils
Fact Sheets on water chestnuts.	List of hot spots.
Large map of lake and areas to be “attacked” during this hand pulling event.	If there are any Threatened and Endangered Species in the Lake a picture of the species.
Information on the group holding the hand pulling event.	Bottle of water.
Example water chestnut “seeds”.	Cell phone number of the event coordinator.
Pictures of areas highly infested.	
Bags for collecting water chestnut.	

The event should close with a Volunteer Appreciation Lunch to thank the volunteers for the work they have done and to provide recognition to the volunteers. Lunch in bags or a barbeque and t-shirt handout, with announcements of the amount pulled or how the goal of cleaning the XYZ cove was achieved are just a few examples.

Weigh each basket or have another method of documenting the weight of water chestnut removed so that the annual weight can be posted on website. This should be correlated with the number of volunteers for reporting purposes later on.

Post-Event

- No matter how large or small a contingent of volunteers, they gave their time to help improve the environment. If possible send out an e-mail thanking all volunteers, possibly with a picture of the "improved" lake or include a statement of improvement such as "We removed 1,000 pounds of water chestnut thanks to your help."
- Do a very brief "story" with pictures of what was accomplished.
- Send a formal thank you to the team leaders, public officials and funders/supporters.
- Evaluate efforts. This should include the amount of water chestnut removed, the number of volunteers recruited, the funders/supporters enlisted and ways to improve the next event.
- Send out a press release with photos documenting the great work that was done.

For More Information

Rector, P. (2010) Pond and Lake Management Part IV: Aquatic Invasive Species: Water Chestnut (Trapa natans) – Prevention and Management. Rutgers NJAES Cooperative Extension Fact Sheet 1119, www.njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS1119.

(2009) AARP and American Rivers. Organizing a River Cleanup Tips, tools and resources for organizers. Create The Good. AARP in conjunction with American Rivers, www.americanrivers.org/our-work/restoring-rivers/national-river-cleanup/about.html

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Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
88 Lipman Drive, New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8525
Phone: 732.932.5000