Flanagan - Int. 2879 or Sater - Int. 2809

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release to PM's, FEBRUARY 1, 1960

ATTACK FORMING ON AQUATIC PLANT THREATENING FISH AND WILDLIFE

Plans are being formulated for a joint Federal-State approach to the watermilfoil invasion which is threatening sport and commerical fisheries, waterfowl habitat and other resources at various places along the mid-Atlantic coast, the Department of the Interior reports.

Eurasian watermilfoil (Myriophyllum spicatum) is not a new weed in this country but in recent years it has increased its range and concentrations to an alarming extent.

Recently, a meeting to discuss the Eurasian watermilfoil infestation and its control was held at the Patuxent Research Center of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Fish and Wildlife Service. Present were representatives from State and Federal agencies concerned with fisheries, wildlife, navigation, water and public health. Preliminary plans were made for a joint survey to determine the extent of the infestation in the Chesapeake Bay area. The growth and reproduction of the plant will be studied under laboratory conditions and limited investigations will be continued to develop satisfactory control procedures.

Eurasian watermilfoil, which resembles several American watermilfoils in appearance, was noticed in 1933 by a Fish and Wildlife Service biologist in Dogue Creek, a tributary to the Potomac River just below Alexandria, Virginia. Since then it has spread along both shores nearly to the mouth of the river. Recently, Fish and Wildlife Service biologists found it on the Susquehanna Flats at the head of Chesapeake Bay. A survey here showed no plants in 1957 and only a few in 1958. By 1959, however, it was present in nearly half of the stations sampled on this 20,000-acre area. In the same year it was found also in a freshwater impoundment of the Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge on the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

What makes this plant such a pest is that it grows rapidly, fills shallow water from bottom to top, and is of little known value to waterfowl or fish. It crowds out waterfowl food plants, covers oyster beds, clogs fishing and crabbing gear, interferes with the use of small boats and curtails water sports. Eurasian watermilfoil presents a broad threat since it grows in fresh water as well as in

water which at times may be half as salty as the sea. In addition, it can exist on a variety of soils from soft muck to hard-packed sand and can tolerate water depths as great as 9 feet. Some growth continues even during the winter. No native aquatic plants are known to be able to compete with it.

Hundreds of acres of excellent waterfowl feeding grounds and many choice fishing areas along the Potomac River have already been choked by this pest. A continued spread of the plant over the Susquehanna Flats could have a very serious effect on at least the distribution of a major part of the canvasback population. The Flats are the chief concentration point for this duck during migration. The canvasback is already in serious straits due to reduced population caused by drought throughout much of its breeding range.

This past summer the Service was able to engage in a small-scale program to determine methods of controlling the weed. Several chemicals showed considerable promise. These materials will be tested more fully in 1960; however, complete results will not be known until the next growing season. Sometimes a weed killer will injure only the leaves of a plant and will leave the rootstocks free to sprout again. Studies must also be made to determine that any chemical control agent selected does not cause significant harm to desirable plant and animal life.

x x x