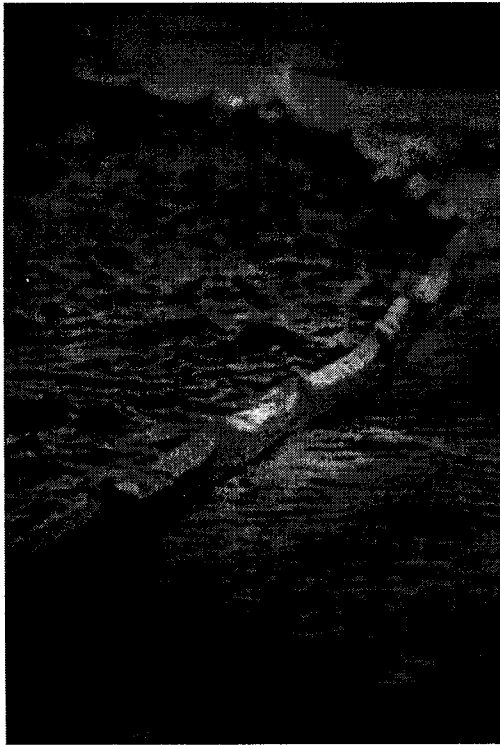


Closed due to salvinia: Weed discovered in plant's reservoir after fisherman's boat is launched

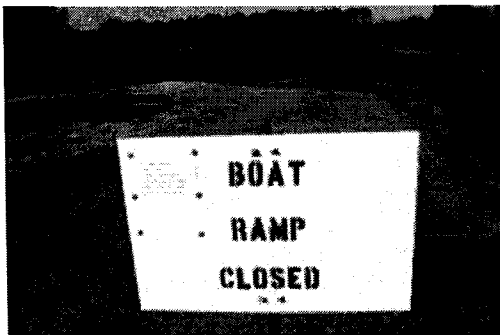
By STEVE BANDY, News Messenger Wednesday, February 27, 2008

The Brandy Branch Reservoir, a man-made lake constructed primarily to provide cooling water for the AEP Southwestern Electric Power Company's Pirkey Power Plant at Hallsville, has been closed due to the introduction of giant salvinia, according to personnel from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Tim Bister, district fisheries biologist for TPWD, said the invasive plant was introduced into the lake Sunday by a fisherman.



Courtney Case/News Messenger
(ENLARGE)

A giant inflatable boom carves out a small area around the Brandy Branch Reservoir public boat ramp in Hallsville after salvinia and water hyacinth were found after a fishing boat was launched Sunday.



Courtney Case/News Messenger
(ENLARGE)

A sign warns people that the boat ramp is closed and why.

Bister said a fisheries technician who was at the lake noticed "plants floating to the surface" after a fisherman had launched his boat at the lake's only ramp. On closer examination, the plants were identified as water hyacinth and giant salvinia.

The fisherman ultimately was issued a citation. Possession or transport of giant salvinia or other prohibited aquatic vegetation in Texas is a Class C misdemeanor punishable by a fine of up to \$500 per plant.

"We've been working out there the last couple of days trying to clear this up, but we're still finding small bits of the giant salvinia in the cattails," Bister said.

Salvinia can be removed by raking or seining it from a pond's surface, but will reestablish from any remaining fragments.

On Tuesday a giant floating boom, much like that used to contain an oil spill, was stretched across the lake around the boat ramp.

"To protect the boom, we've had to close the boat ramp. Since this is the only ramp, we've, in effect, closed the lake," Bister said.

Bister said the warm waters of the power plant reservoir provide an excellent environment for the growth of the giant salvinia.

Salvinia molesta is considered to be one of the world's most noxious aquatic weeds, notorious for dominating slow moving or quiet freshwaters. Its rapid growth, vegetative reproduction and tolerance to environmental stress make it an aggressive, competitive species known to impact aquatic environments, water use and local economies.

Under optimal conditions (light, temperature and nutrient) in the laboratory, plant populations have been found to double in size every two to four days. Under favorable natural conditions, biomass doubled in about one week to 10 days. A single plant has been described to cover 40 square miles in three months.

Giant salvinia has the potential to alter aquatic ecosystems in several ways. Rapidly expanding populations can overgrow and replace native plants. Resulting dense surface cover prevents light and atmospheric oxygen from entering the water. Meanwhile, decomposing material drops to the bottom, greatly consuming dissolved oxygen needed by fish and other aquatic life.

Giant salvinia clogs water intakes to interfere with agricultural irrigation and electrical generation.

Brandy Branch Reservoir, also known as Hallsville or Pirkey Lake, is located about eight miles southwest of Marshall in Harrison County, about three miles south of Interstate Highway 20 at Exit 610. It is an impoundment of Brandy Branch Creek in the Sabine River Basin.

The 1,242-acre reservoir was constructed in 1983 to serve as a cooling pond for the steam-electric power plant. It is popular with area fishermen, especially during the cooler months. The predominant fish species include largemouth bass, bluegill and redear sunfish and channel catfish.

Named in honor of Henry W. Pirkey Jr., SWEPCO president from 1965 to 1972, Pirkey is a single 675-megawatt generating unit operated by SWEPCO that began commercial operation in January 1985. SWEPCO, an operating unit of American Electric Power, based in Columbus, Ohio, serves 443,000 customers across three states, including 167,000 in East Texas.

Giant salvinia has long been a problem at Caddo Lake and at other bodies of water in Texas. Recently, TPWD reported that giant salvinia was found for the first time Jan. 28 in Sam Rayburn Reservoir in the back of Coleman Creek. Also, on Lake Palestine, a citizen reported giant salvinia and water hyacinth in the vicinity of the Kickapoo Creek boat ramp on Feb. 5.

To help reduce the risk of spreading this or any invasive species, TPWD offers the following procedures:

Remove any visible plants, mud, fish or animals before transporting equipment.

Eliminate water from equipment before transporting.

Clean and dry anything that came in contact with water, including boats, trailers, equipment, etc.

Never release plants, fish or animals into a body of water unless they came out of that body of water.