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Texas Launches New Front in War on Invasive Species

Awareness Campaign Says "Hello Giant Salvinia, Goodbye Texas Lakes"

AUSTIN — The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department today launched a public awareness campaign asking people to help control one of the most dangerous invasive aquatic species the state has ever known — giant salvinia.

A native of Brazil, giant salvinia (*Salvinia molesta*) is a floating, rootless fern that can double its coverage area in less than a week. The invasive plant, first discovered in a small pond near Houston in 1998, has been reported in 17 Texas lakes, including some of the state's most popular recreational water bodies: Toledo Bend, Sam Rayburn, Caddo Lake, Sheldon Lake, Lake Texana and Lake Conroe.

Left unchecked, giant salvinia can choke off boating and fishing access to an entire lake, clog power plant water intakes, and displace beneficial native plants needed by fish.

"Not only is giant salvinia endangering the ecology of our Texas lakes, it's threatening the economies of lakeside communities that depend on fishing, boating, and tourism," said Carter Smith, TPWD executive director.

"The truth is most invasive species cannot be eradicated; we can only hope to slow their spread or prevent their arrival," said Peter Holt, TPW Commission chairman. "Education is indeed critical, and with this effort we have a chance to rally public support, thanks to additional funding from the Texas Legislature and help from many partners."

"Texans need to be aware of the threat from giant salvinia and active in its management," said Gov. Rick Perry. "If we don't get a handle on it and the other invasive species that are working their way into our ecosystem, the Texas we know and love will be changed forever and not for the better."

With the arrival of the spring outdoor recreation season, TPWD is launching a campaign to educate the public about ways to identify, report and stop giant salvinia, which is usually spread unknowingly by people moving their boats from lake to lake.

"It only takes one little tiny section of a plant to start a new infestation," said Howard Elder, an aquatic vegetation control expert in TPWD's Inland Fisheries Division.

Transporting giant salvinia — as well as other invasive species — is prohibited by state law. It is class C misdemeanor punishable by a fine of up to \$500 per violation.

Because it grows so fast, mechanical methods to remove the plant are impractical and the use of herbicides

amounts to a costly, after-the-fact control measure.

"No one has enough money to fix the problem once this plant gets established," Elder said, emphasizing that the key to stop its spread is an informed citizenry who care about healthy Texas lakes.

"We need everyone to keep their eyes open," Elder said. "Learn to identify giant salvinia and other invasive species and report infestations to Texas Parks and Wildlife. Clean your boat, trailer and gear thoroughly when you leave the water."

(See "more about the campaign" below.)

One thing is clear at the outset: all the messages won't do any good without the active involvement of the public, especially boaters, anglers and lakeside communities.

"The only way we can beat giant salvinia is if everyone understands how important it is to always clean their boat, jet ski, trailer and gear when leaving a lake," Elder said.

What you can do

- Learn to identify and report giant salvinia and other invasive aquatic species.
- Clean your boat, trailer and gear and place plant material in a trash can before leaving a boat ramp area.
- If you see giant salvinia, report it at giantssalvinia@tpwd.state.tx.us or (409) 384-9965.
- Learn more online at <http://www.texasinvasives.org/>

MORE ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN

TPWD is working with Sherry Matthews Advocacy Marketing on the multi-pronged awareness campaign, which will communicate the message "Hello Giant Salvinia, Goodbye Texas Lakes," and the call-to-action "Clean your boat, trailer and gear." The campaign includes floating buoys, gas station pump toppers and billboards at or near four targeted lakes: Caddo, Toledo Bend, Lake Conroe and Sam Rayburn. Television, radio, online advertising and social media platforms like Facebook will also reach anglers, boaters and water recreationists.

The television commercial features a "salvinia monster" character hitching a ride in a boat with a fisherman to bring humorous appeal to a serious issue. Austin-based actor and comedian Josh Painting portrays the wisecracking monster, and will make several appearances at public fishing events this spring and summer.

All campaign efforts drive traffic to www.texasinvasives.org, where visitors can find a wealth of information about giant salvinia and other terrestrial and aquatic invasives. This site, managed by the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin, went through a major redesign this year for the campaign. TPWD's marketing group and ad agency worked with the wildflower center to make the site more visually appealing, easier to navigate and more accessible to non-scientists, while still featuring a separate robust section for professionals. The redesign emphasizes public interaction, including a new "Report It" function where people can log sightings of invasive pests, plus new mapping tools showing pest locations reported by Citizen Scientist volunteers.

The 2010 salvinia campaign marks the start of an umbrella effort that in future years will focus on other invasive plants and animals. TPWD is able to undertake the campaign thanks to \$1.5 million in additional funding allocated by the 81st Texas Legislature specifically for public education and management actions to control invasive aquatic plants. For the campaign, TPWD is using \$100,000 of this appropriation, plus other state and federal funds, bringing the total campaign cost to about \$280,000.

To evaluate campaign effectiveness, TPWD will survey more than 3,000 boaters and anglers randomly drawn from within 60 miles of the four targeted lakes to find out their awareness of the problem and their attitudes and behavior. Surveys will be done before and after the awareness campaign to determine if the target population saw advertising or messaging that influenced a change in awareness, attitudes and behavior.

On the Net:

- Campaign Web site, complete information for the public: <http://www.texasinvasives.org/>
- News media resources, photos, graphics, maps, audio, video: http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/newsmedia/releases/news_roundup/giant_salvinia/
- Giant salvinia online video on TPWD's YouTube Channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/TexasParksWildlife#p/c/D6860F6B8B22B497/0/-cgiJuoM4Jo>

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