

VIEWPOINTS

OUR VIEW

The war against giant salvinia

To someone unfamiliar with the circumstances, we suppose it must sound a bit silly to say that the existence of Caddo Lake is seriously threatened by the invasion of a weed.

Most think of weeds as a mere nuisance, something that, even if not dealt with will not cause much harm.

But in a lake, and Caddo Lake particularly, giant salvinia is no simple weed. It endangers the future of Texas' first lake and it must be taken seriously.

Fortunately for us, it has been since it was first noticed at the lake a few years ago.

Numerous tactics have been tried on the weed, from spraying to containing with booms to actively cultivating.

All of them have worked to a degree. None of them have been "the" answer that will solve the problem.

Indeed, winter before last when temperatures dropped significantly, we were helped by Mother Nature herself. The cold helped kill a large portion of the weed, slowing its return the following spring.

But a survey of the lake recently showed that last winter's extremes, which were just about as severe, did not do nearly the damage.

In other words, natural selection killed the salvinia that could not take the cold and left what could.

We cannot count on the weather to help us again.

To that end, scientists from Texas A&M University are testing the ability of South American weevils — which help control giant salvinia in its native environment — to hold down the growth of the plants.

The problem after one winter is that the weevils are not as hardy as the plants. But scientists are back at it hoping to get the tiny critters chomping on the salvinia quickly now that winter is done.

The weevils don't actually eat all of the plants, but they do bore through the main stem of giant salvinia, which kills it.

Only time will tell whether this experiment will work but those who love Caddo — and anyone who has seen the lake loves it — need to be prepared to take as many next steps as are needed.

Giant salvinia really does have the ability to kill the lake and all the fish life in it.

Its growth rate is almost unbelievable and, if allowed to go unchecked for just a few summers, it could be too late.

We would offer high praise to the scientists and even more to those who have toiled for many hours to check the spread of the plant.

But the fight is nowhere near over and, worse yet, it may never really be done. This could be just the beginning of efforts that must take place every single year.

Some can give of their time and labor, some can give money and a few can give both, but all must give what they can.

This is one tough plant, but we still believe East Texans are tougher and will rise up and work together to save the lake. We're in the battle for the long run.