

Giant salvinia spreading across East Texas waterways

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Michael Cavazos. Weevil infested salvinia is loaded into containers in July 2012 to be transported to the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge's salvinia weevil rearing facility in Karnack.

An invasive water weed that grows rapidly and chokes out other living plants on lakes has spread beyond Caddo Lake to at least four other East Texas lakes.

Giant salvinia, a non-native invasive aquatic plant, has been found at several lakes around East Texas over the past few months, leading to concerns over how quickly the destructive plant is spreading.

Since October, giant salvinia has been found at boat ramps on Lake O' the Pines, Lake

Wright Patman, Lake Gilmer and Lake Murval in Panola County, according to Lynn Wright, with Texas Parks and Wildlife.

“It’s not as severe yet at the other lakes,” said Lynn Wright, spokesman for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. “We did initial cleanup when it was discovered at the other lakes and picked up all we could see.”

This has led to increased efforts by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department staff to inspect boat ramps for invasive plants and remove them before they become established.

“We’ll continue to monitor the other lakes as the weather gets warmer because all it takes is one leaf left behind to get it started growing when temperatures warm up,” Wright said. “It grows very rapidly and can double in just a week.”

Giant salvinia is usually spread unknowingly by boaters when the plants cling to boats and trailers. A probable source of giant salvinia in East Texas is Caddo Lake, where the giant salvinia coverage is particularly high this winter, officials said.

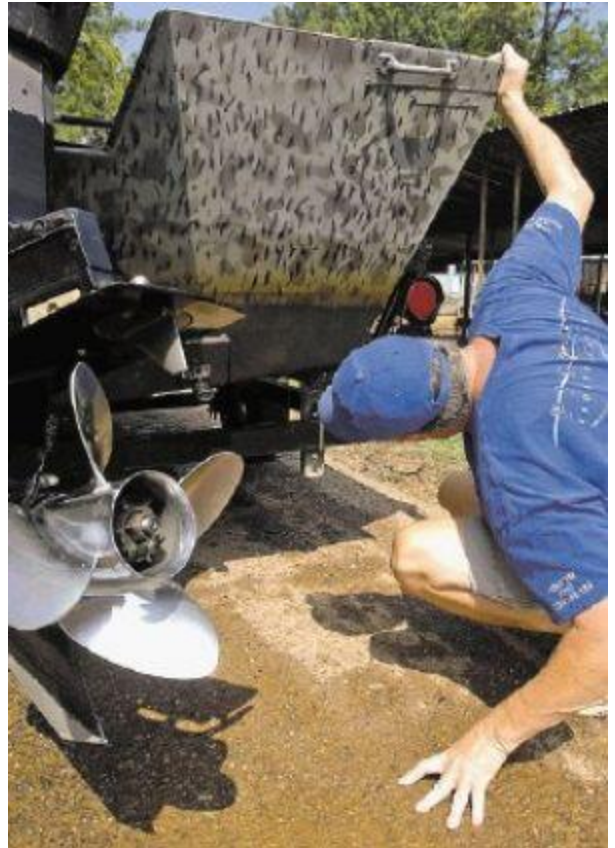
“Most ramps on Caddo are currently covered in giant salvinia, and it is almost impossible to launch a boat without covering the trailer with the invasive plant,” Wright said. “A single plant transported on a boat trailer from one lake to another can lead to a new infestation.”

He said giant salvinia can severely limit fishing and boating access as well as displace native beneficial plants that are used as habitat by fish. Once it becomes established in a lake, it is nearly impossible to completely remove.

TPWD crews have been successful in eradicating giant salvinia in some lakes when it was spotted early and confined to the area immediately around a boat ramp, but the best way to prevent it from infesting a lake is not to introduce it at all, Wright said.

He urged all boaters to learn to identify giant salvinia as well as other invasive species that occur in Texas waters. Most importantly, boaters should remember to clean their boats and trailers before leaving the boat ramp.

Transporting giant salvinia, along with other invasive species, is prohibited by law and punishable by a fine of up to \$500 per violation.



Justin Baker. Shady Glade Resort owner David Smith checks to make sure his boat and trailer are free of giant salvinia in July 2010 after pulling it out of Caddo Lake.