

Growing fears about salvinia on Cross Lake

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By Jeff Ferrell, Reporter



Cross Lake resident William Purdy tries to navigate through the giant salvinia on the western side of the lake. (Source: Jeff Ferrell/KSLA)

SHREVEPORT, LA (KSLA) -

Could Shreveport's water supply be in jeopardy in the future? The concern involves giant salvinia. While South Louisiana is getting a handle on the problem, it's a different situation in north Louisiana.

William Purdy calls Cross Lake home. But he describes giant salvinia a scourge to the lake; a weed that just won't die.

"It'll kill anything else growing in the lake," he said. That's despite years of crews spraying herbicide to kill the South American fern. While the presence of salvinia is not new to the lake, Purdy and his wife Shelley invited us on a boat tour to help show the public that the problem has only gone from bad to worse.

Purdy told us, "This is the worst I've ever seen it in the west end of the lake." He's just hoping more public awareness will lead to more concentrated spraying. Otherwise, "We're going to lose the lake, just like Bistineau. The only problem is they can't drain this lake because this is the city water supply," concluded Purdy.

As if the spreading of the giant salvinia wasn't a big enough problem already on Cross Lake, now grass is beginning to grow atop the salvinia. That only makes the matting even thicker and tougher on boats. A prime example of it can be seen in a cordoned off area, ironically the very site where scientists have been working on a long-term solution: The use of weevils; tiny black insects that lay their eggs in salvinia, killing the plant.

Weevils are helping clear waterways in south Louisiana. But cold weather up here in the winter kills nearly all the weevils and not the salvinia.

While the race is on to develop cold-resistant weevils, the Purdy's fear better salvinia control may only come when it begins to appear more on the eastern side of Cross Lake. "With the winds, when they change like they do and the floods, it's going to get down there and it can mess up the flood systems," said Shelley Purdy. Then we could have even bigger troubles.

Giant salvinia is native to Brazil and grows at a tremendous rate. It has spread like wildfire through the southern U.S. the last two decades, choking the life out of infected waterways.



Giant salvinia, a fast-growing South American fern has spread like wildfire in the southern U.S. in the last two decades. (Source: Jeff Ferrell/KSLA)

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