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Invasive plant eradicated from Peconic River

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After three years of work by hundreds of volunteers, the state Department of Environmental Conservation Tuesday declared victory in clearing out an invasive water plant that threatened to choke the life from the Peconic River.

At a briefing near a state boat launch on the Peconic in Calverton, regional DEC director Peter Scully said the agency got the upper hand on the plant, *Ludwigia peploides*, also known as water primrose, by organizing harvests with local civic, environmental and fishing groups.

The DEC and Suffolk County's Peconic Estuary Program teamed with workers from groups such as The Nature Conservancy, Freshwater Anglers of Long Island and the Long Island Bassmasters to comb the river for the fast-growing weed, which forms large mats that hamper kayaking and fishing.

No one is sure how water primrose showed up in Long Island waters, but it may have been a decorative planting.

Scully said eradicating the plant, which drains oxygen from water and blocks light below the surface, is one of more than a dozen projects the DEC has launched on Long Island, but an important victory.

"We're facing challenges all over Long Island," he said. "Solutions are few and far between."

The plant first appeared on the river in 2003. By 2006 it was expanding wildly, doubling every two weeks during the warm growing season, said Laura Stephenson, the DEC's Peconic Estuary coordinator.

The effort isn't over. Charles Guthrie, regional fisheries manager for the DEC, said newly installed signs will help alert people on the water to small patches of water primrose that may reappear. "We really knocked the weed back so that it's just a sprig here and there," he said. "We don't want to have to start the process over again."

The signs educate boaters and others about the plant and also mark disposal sites for the plants.

Dan Leonard, a volunteer from Calverton who has fished the river for 40 years, said ridding the Peconic of the "heavy, waterlogged vine" involved dragging it onto land. The plant filled dozens of trash bins.

The eradication effort is "a real success story," said Rick Balla, Peconic Estuary program coordinator for the Environmental Protection Agency, which helped fund of the program. "It's really cause to celebrate."

Assemb. Fred Thiele (R-Sag Harbor) said the effort showed volunteers working "one at a time, day after day" can make a big difference. "This truly has been a partnership," he said.

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