

Weed treatment plans may die for fund lack

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — Unless funds are restored by the Commonwealth, the planned treatment of obnoxious weeds in ponds in this state will be dropped for this year.

Applications of herbicides approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the state Department of Environmental Quality Engineering started last year, among others, in three ponds in this vicinity. They are Mill Pond and part of Forge Pond in Littleton the balance of Forge in Westford, and Sandy Pond in Ayer.

There were three applications during the past summer to clear up unwanted weeds and algae and reports at the end of the season indicated that a good start had been made on a three-year program. This obnoxious vegetation hinders recreational activities, including boating and fishing.

The major culprit and hardest to control is the cabomba or fanwort. This is best described as a small underwater pine tree and much harder to eliminate than a similar weed, milfoil, which responds to chemicals much quicker. To fishermen, the weed is a particular menace.

WARMER THAN normal weather this spring, when bathing was observed as early as April 19, raised the temperature of the water to give the weeds an early growth start.

According to Albert J. Trusas of Allied Biological Control of Waltham, the bio-engineer who treated the ponds last year under contract, the cabomba will now greatly extend its domain because it is not competing as much with other weeds as previously. He indicated that the money spent last year, a portion of which was supplied by the towns involved, will be "partly wasted inasmuch as the program requires a three-year application, three times a year." He fears that the expense to revitalize the eradication program next year will be much more costly.

Flanagan Pond was treated three weeks ago, with the cost being borne by Ayer. Without further state aid, however, it may mean dropping this treatment already started for aquatic weed control.

Application of the approved herbicides is done on the surface of the water by an air-driven "swamp buggy" which swings in and out of coves and inlets with ease. Several passes are made in particularly heavily infested areas with the chemicals. An example was last year in the vicinity of the Westford town beach.