

Eurasian Milfoil (Milfoil)

Frequently Asked Questions



What is milfoil?

Eurasian milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) is a non-native, invasive aquatic plant. The leaves of milfoil are submerged, and grow in whorls of four, with many thread-like leaflets. This plant can grow from broken-off stems and can spread quickly, creating dense mats that may crowd out native plants and hinder recreation.

What causes milfoil to grow?

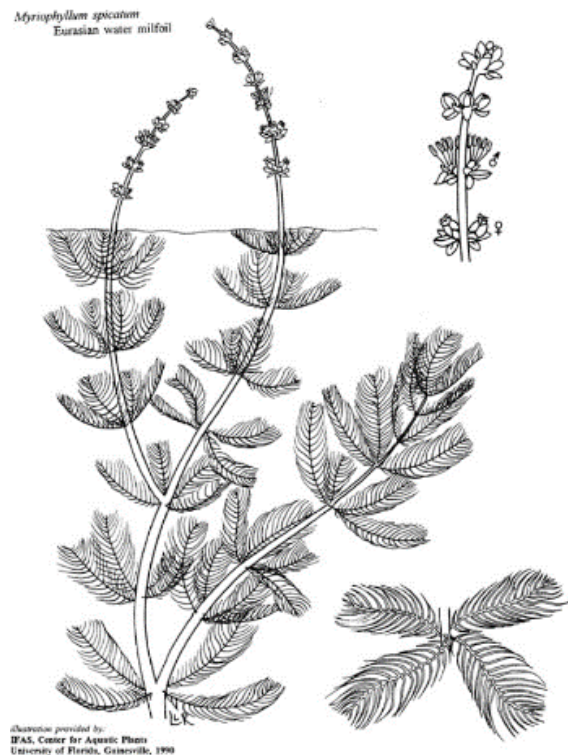
There are many factors that impact milfoil growth. Fertilizers from lawns, septic drain fields, waterfowl droppings, water levels and sunlight all contribute to growth. Milfoil can also be brought to the Lake Tapps Reservoir from other water bodies by boats. Milfoil growth varies year by year depending on all these factors.

Does Cascade have a legal obligation to control milfoil?

No, Milfoil is a non-regulated weed in Pierce County and Cascade has no regulatory obligations to control milfoil (or native plants) in the Lake Tapps Reservoir. However, Cascade will continue to manage milfoil.

What is Cascade doing about milfoil?

When Cascade took over the Lake Tapps Reservoir, there was a large amount of milfoil, and Cascade implemented a program in 2010 to manage it. To date, Cascade has spent over \$2.25M treating milfoil in the reservoir.



- **Chemical Treatment:** Cascade has primarily managed milfoil with chemical treatments and has been using the herbicide ProcellaCOR since 2019. The reservoir is assessed annually to determine the areas in greatest need of treatment and the milfoil is treated in two phases. See www.cascadewater.org/milfoil for current treatment plans and maps.
- **TappsWise Program:** Since nutrients from lawns and septic tanks can significantly increase vegetation growth, Cascade, in partnership with the Tacoma-Pierce County Department of Health, started the TappsWise program to promote natural yard care and septic maintenance to keep the reservoir clean and healthy (www.tpchd.org/TappsWise).
- **Pilot Studies:** Cascade conducted two pilot studies on controlling milfoil with bottom barriers and dry-land herbicide treatments. Neither pilot project was successful in controlling milfoil for more than a one- or two-year period.
- **Research:** Cascade hired a research team to sample and identify the various genotypes in the reservoir and eleven strains were found.

What can homeowners do about milfoil?

Homeowners may remove aquatic plants from the Lake Tapps Reservoir in front of their property by hand, but they must follow rules outlined in Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's "*Aquatic Plants and Fish: Rules for Aquatic Plant Removal and Control*" at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/01728>.

Nutrients from lawns and septic tanks may significantly increase growth of vegetation, so reducing fertilizer applications and keeping septic tanks maintained and working properly will reduce growth. Residents are encouraged to participate in the TappsWise program at www.tpchd.org/TappsWise.

Can homeowners contribute financially towards chemical treatment for milfoil in front of their homes?

As the owner of the reservoir and the lakebed up to 545' elevation, Cascade is the only entity that is permitted by the Washington Department of Ecology to apply herbicides in the water. Although Cascade can treat the most heavily concentrated areas in the reservoir, it doesn't have the funds to treat all impacted areas, such as small patches that affect a limited number of homeowners. To address these needs, and at the request of some Lake Tapps Reservoir homeowners, Cascade allows individual homeowners or homeowner associations (HOAs), at their own expense, to use Cascade's permit and contract directly with its contractor to chemically treat milfoil in front of their residences. For more info in this program visit cascadewater.org/lake-tapps/milfoil.

Cascade operates the reservoir differently than Puget Sound Energy. Does that alter its regulatory obligations to control noxious weeds?

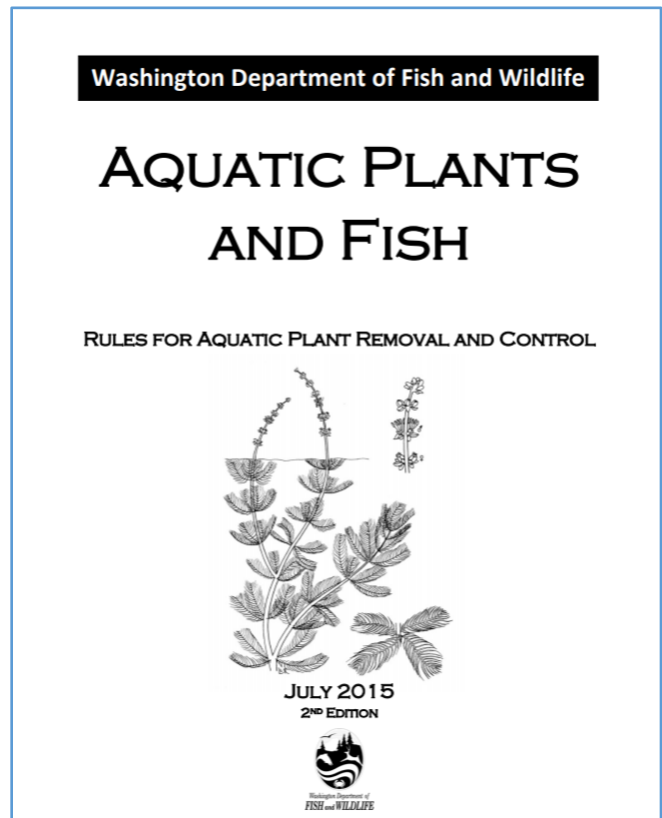
No, regulatory obligations are not altered due to different operations.

Cascade is required to control the water flow through the reservoir according to water rights approved by the State Department of Ecology. Does water flow impact milfoil?

Yes, to some extent, although there are many factors that cause milfoil to grow. Reduced water flow has decreased the turbidity of the water, so it is clearer than when Puget Sound Energy operated the reservoir, and this clarity increases sunlight that reaches places that are more likely to support plant growth. However, milfoil was also present when Puget Sound Energy operated Lake Tapps Reservoir at higher flows, and when Cascade took over the reservoir in 2010, almost \$400K was spent treating milfoil the first year.

Will lowering the reservoir during the winter kill milfoil?

No, milfoil plants need at least two to four weeks without rain in combination with continued freezing temperatures to limit regrowth, conditions which rarely occur in the Pacific Northwest.



Is this vegetation similar to what a homeowner would typically encounter in a similar Northwest water body?



Yes, Cascade surveys and treats milfoil, and the levels are similar to that which would typically be found in a similar Northwest waterbody.

Is swimming in Lake Tapps Reservoir safe?

All swimmers do so at their own risk. This is included in the deeds from 1954 and 1958 that each homeowner holds. Aquatic vegetation is typically found in Northwest lakes regardless of whether they were raised and lowered. Cascade has done much to reduce milfoil to an amount similar to that found in other lakes.

Do Lake Tapps Reservoir residents pay for the work Cascade does on Lake Tapps?

No, Cascade does not receive, or use, any Pierce County property taxes, nor resident dollars. All projects are paid for by Cascade members: the cities of Bellevue, Kirkland, Issaquah, Redmond and Tukwila; and Sammamish Plateau Water and Skyway Water and Sewer District.

Does Cascade treat native plants?

No, Cascade does not treat native plants.

Can homeowners remove native plants?

Homeowners may remove some of the native plants in front of their own properties following the rules outlined in Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's "*Aquatic Plants and Fish: Rules for Aquatic Plant Removal and Control*" at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/01728>

For more information about milfoil:

www.cascadewater.org/milfoil

