



Connecticut Tree Protective Association, Inc., elected officers at its recent annual meeting at the Hartford Hilton Hotel and began preparations for an active year. Shown seated, from left: Treasurer Bernard Wright, Danbury; Vice-president Thomas J. Williams, Cheshire Tree Service, Cheshire; President Kenneth L. Grimm, Walgren Tree Experts, Inc., West Hartford, and Secretary Charles Meli, Park Department, Hartford. Standing: J. Baylis Earle, park superintendent, Glastonbury (left) and Dr. Philip Rusden, Greenwich, editor.

## State Imports Flea Beetle For Alligator Weed Control

A voracious little bug imported from South America has been credited with clearing an obnoxious stream-clogging weed from a Florida river.

The bug is a flea beetle, a tiny insect which feeds rapidly and exclusively on alligator weed, one of several plants which plague Florida lakes and streams.

The flea beetle is about the size of a common ladybug. It devoured almost all alligator weed along a 45 to 50-mile stretch of the Peace River in Florida's Polk and Hardee counties.

Forrest Ware, fishery biologist for the Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission, said the weed had spread across as much as two-thirds of the river's width as recently as last spring.

"It's very impressive," Ware said. "The flea beetle hasn't been 100 percent effective in all areas in which it has been tried, but it

sure has worked in the Peace River."

The insects were brought into the United States by biologists involved in aquatic weed control programs of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

After careful screening and testing by the Corps as well as the USDA to make sure insects were damaging only alligator weed, colonies were released at several weed-infested locations.

One was Lake Parker at Lakeland, in central Florida, where flea beetles were turned loose on unwanted aquatic growth during the spring and summer of 1966.

Last spring, Ware was placed in charge of a program designed to restore the Peace River from damages brought about by pollution from a slimepond break at a phosphate plant.

"That's when we saw the lush growth of alligator weed," he said. "Then, later, we saw the foliage turning brown. We investigated and found flea beetles were eating it."

Ware said he surmises the insects migrated south to the Peace from Lake Parker. None had been released directly on the river.

The biologist said alligator weed had previously been very difficult to control. Chemicals provided the primary method of attack.

The plant takes root anywhere from the edge of a lake or stream to a depth of about two feet. Stems grow to the surface and then move horizontally, intertwining to form a thick, almost impenetrable mat.

The plant breathes through growth extending some 12 to 18 inches above the water surface, and this is where the flea beetle comes in. He and his mates completely devour everything above water. The plant, in effect, drowns.

There has been no evidence anywhere in Florida to indicate the insect is attracted to or associated with any other plant, Ware said.



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