

Numerous Agencies Battle Florida's Aquatic Weeds

The State of Florida is losing out in a fight that's been going on for more than a decade against aquatic weeds in its fresh water lakes.

Various groups have been trying various methods of control and the result has been more water weeds than ever.

It is a two-part problem.

First, no one is quite sure just what is the most effective way to control or eliminate any one weed, much less all or most of them.

Second, no one has had a real opportunity to be effective since there is such duplication of effort and fragmentation of authority in existing programs.

Florida Governor Claude Kirk set up an Aquatic Research and Development Commission a year ago which has itemized the problems and come up with what it considers could be some solutions to the problem.

The Committee wants to invest heavily in research and establish a vehicle through which control programs can be coordi-

nated. The details are to be worked out with state, federal and local officials.

According to a preliminary study, during the fiscal year which ended last June 30, no fewer than 39 different agencies (14 state and federal, 25 district and county) spent more than \$1.3 million in an unsuccessful effort to clear Florida's lakes, streams and waterways.

In an effort to eliminate this vast multiplicity of effort and authority, the committee recommends creation of a coordinating agency under the Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission to handle all control, planning and research.

Another recommendation is that present county, district and area funding by millage or other tax be rescinded and operation monies come from earmarked sources and the general fund.

Legislation Is Sought

This would save some counties as much as \$35,000 per year, but the taxpayers probably wouldn't notice it because the committee estimates "not less than \$2.5 million yearly can ac-

complish this function effectively."

The preliminary report asks Florida's congressional delegation to introduce legislation which would make the state a center of nationwide research on aquatic plants.

"Florida, unfortunately," reads the report, "contains natural test areas for such research and development activities." On the other hand, "we have more trained talent and facilities to find the answers than any other area."

One of the weeds the committee is anxious to control is the water hyacinth. But the cause for most concern are two new menaces in Florida's fresh water, elodea hydrilla and Eurasian water milfoil.

These plants have spread "with unbelievable speed," according to the committee and "show graphic evidence of rapidly becoming 100 times more damaging than the floating hyacinth."

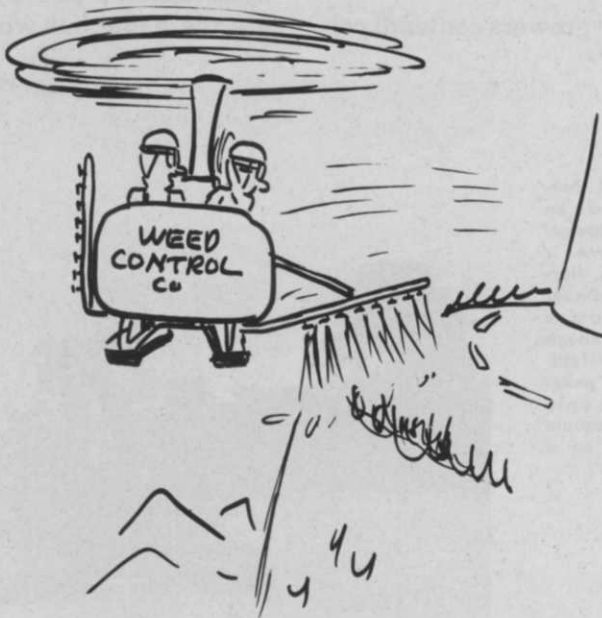
Elodea has almost choked the Crystal River in Florida and milfoil, which grows in both fresh and brackish water, has a 3000-acre foothold in the Gulf of Mexico at the mouth of the Homosassa River in Florida.

One of the major control problems, the committee points out, lies in the fact that elodea and milfoil cannot be clipped or cut in any way as a means of control.

The report contains engineering estimates that say unless a way is found to eradicate elodea and milfoil, drainage canals will have to be increased in size by 160 percent to provide necessary water flow.

There is a possibility water hyacinths could form the basis for a new industry which, in turn, would help control this floating weed, Florida officials say.

A machine which harvests, crushes and grinds hyacinths into a supplement for animal feed has been tested with success on the Peace River.



"YOU COULDN'T GET ME TO USE A TRUCK TO SPREAD THOSE WEEDS UP HERE. TOO DANGEROUS."