AQUATIC INVASIVE WEEDS TEST IN TAHOE KEYS PROVING SUCCESSFUL – FIRST TURBIDITY CURTAINS BEING REMOVED

Herbicide degradation at 100% in Area B meets stringent guidelines

Sept. 6, 2022 *(South Lake Tahoe, Calif.)* – The Tahoe Keys Property Owners Association project to test innovative methods to control the largest infestation of aquatic invasive weeds in the Tahoe Basin is proving successful. With herbicide levels now at non-detect status, turbidity curtains in Area B of the Keys, in place since May to restrict herbicide movement are being removed this week, also allowing for boating activity. Forecasts in Area A of the Keys suggest levels will reach non-detect status by mid-to late September, with curtain removal there soon after.

"This is the first step in the effective implementation of the Control Methods Test and a major milestone in the battle against aquatic invasive weeds which threaten Lake Tahoe's clarity," said Dr. Lars Anderson, an aquatic ecology/invasive species specialist working on the project. "The results certainly portend major progress as the two applied herbicides acted specifically and effectively on the target invasive weeds: Eurasian watermilfoil, curlyleaf pondweed and coontail, while ensuring safety guidelines for people, pets and wildlife. We've also received promising reports on the efficacy of the UV treatments thus far."

The three-year field test project was preceded by a multi-year collaborative public planning process and extensive environmental review by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board. On May 25, TKPOA began trials of EPA-approved herbicides, in conjunction with UVC light treatment, and The League to Save Lake Tahoe initiated the multi-year laminar flow aeration program, a process to aerate the lagoon bottom sediments with small bubbles to reduce plant growth in designated test areas. TRPA simultaneously launched independent rigorous monitoring for the project to collect data on the efficacy of treatments, water quality, and overall data on how the natural environment responds to the various treatments.

"TKPOA and the Control Methods Test team is committed to following the permit conditions and stringent guidelines of the thorough and intensely monitored program," said Anderson. The herbicides levels degraded by over 99% within 4-6 weeks to about 5-6 parts per billion (ppb), with the last half-percent to reach 1 ppb now realized.

"It's also important to note that the CMT permit-driven herbicide threshold to allow curtain removal is 400 times lower than EPA-stated safe 'receiving water limits' established for other lake systems throughout the U.S., he added. "To grasp the 'scale' of 1 part per billion, it is equivalent to 1 inch in 16,000 miles; or 3 seconds in a century; or about an inch and a half compared to the circumference of the earth."

“Preliminary hydroacoustic scans and imagery of the weeds are encouraging in both herbicide and UV-C treatment areas,” said Pete Wolcott, Chair of the TKPOA Water Quality Committee. “With the removal of the curtains in Area B, we are anxious to start UV-C treatment in our first “combo” site. And we certainly appreciate the understanding and patience of the homeowners and public during this period.”

A status report on initial testing efforts will be released this fall with the preliminary results at www.tahoekeysweeds.org. No additional herbicide application or boating restrictions will occur with the project, but extensive monitoring will continue alongside non-chemical methods for the next two years. The results of the three-year test will inform long-term management plans for addressing aquatic invasive weeds in the Tahoe Keys.

There has been unusually extensive algae growth inside of test area A that includes an unpleasant odor and widespread discoloration. These conditions are likely due to the prolonged isolation and lack of circulation. Conditions have improved somewhat over the last week and should continue a return to normal as air and water temperatures begin to drop.

Incidentally, algae and harmful algal blooms (HABs) have been noted this summer throughout California’s aquatic eco-systems, including beaches around Lake Tahoe and in the Tahoe Keys due in part to the low lake levels. While no area at the Lake is currently considered in a danger zone, caution is suggested. Inside the Keys during the test period, algae growth continues to be extensively monitored, and to date, “warning level” HABs have only been observed outside the Tahoe Keys CMT Project test areas.

Learn more about the CMT project at www.tahoekeysweeds.org.

Turbidity curtain in Tahoe Keys as part of the control methods test has now been removed with herbicide levels at non-detect status.

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About Tahoe Keys Property Owners Association
The Tahoe Keys Property Owners Association (TKPOA) is a well-maintained and operated recreational-oriented residential association of 1,528 property owners on the shores of Lake Tahoe.