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Aquatic Plant Takeover In Delta

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Staff Writer



Hyacinth is a non-native plant that has been problematic in the California Delta -- at times engulfing the majority of sloughs in the region. Only in the past 10 years has Egeria densa, a South American plant, become detrimental to the Delta's waterways.

Taking up as much as 12 percent of the Delta, according to a Contra Costa County report, the weed is growing at a rapid pace, making it near impossible for some to get their boats out of the dock, or fish in certain areas.

The plant is also choking out fish, making it hard for them to get oxygen and find open water to swim. The problem has been most prevalent in Discovery Bay and Bethel Island, both areas that rely on water access.

"The plants have even taken over some of my favorite fishing spots," said long-time Delta fishing guide Jay Sorensen. "The only way to fish in some spots is to drift live minnows. Frank's Tract was one of my favorite places and you can't even fish there anymore."

Bethel Island residents Ralph and Cheryl McClane are new to the area, but have been dealing with the issue for some time. It's nearly impossible to get their boat out at times.

"The plants get caught in the prop of the boat," he said. "They make docking the houseboat difficult and time consuming."

While residents throughout the region deal with the plant takeover, the Hyacinth has become less of a problem over the years. In the early '80s it was an epidemic that concerned citizens throughout the state.

"There were huge islands of it, especially back in '83 it was terrible," said Sorensen. "It could pull your anchor loose."

Now, people are dealing with Egeria densa in drastic measures if need be.

"Cal Boating and Waterways have sprayed it with low levels of 24D, or Agent Orange upon request," said Sorensen. "It has become so coagulated, it is difficult to get your boat in or out of dock."

It is believed that Egeria densa came from an aquarium years ago that was dumped into the Delta. Now it covers a large portion of the region and shows no signs of stopping.

To remove the invasive plant species in Discovery Bay, it is costing \$2,000 per square acre-foot. In Discovery Bay, 688 square acres will be treated to try and get rid of the plant takeover -- a costly sum to when money is needed in other critical areas.

"I can't go for a swim in the afternoon. We can't enjoy the water around us at all. No children can go swimming or play in the water when they come to visit," said Cheryl McClane. "We are new to this area and weren't expecting this problem."

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McClane emphasized that she didn't want to sound negative because she enjoys the area and loves living on the Delta.

"It is our lifelong dream and are thrilled to be here," she said.

At the same time, it shows that an impact this intrusive plant has had on so many people -- not just in Bethel Island or Discovery Bay, but throughout the Delta.

"Even the dog thinks it's land and goes to walk on it and falls in the water," said Ralph McClane. "I find fishing much more difficult because I get my line stuck when reeling in."

There is no immediate cure to this problem, and as the plant continues to take over, it will become a matter of whether people can afford to take it out, and properly.

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