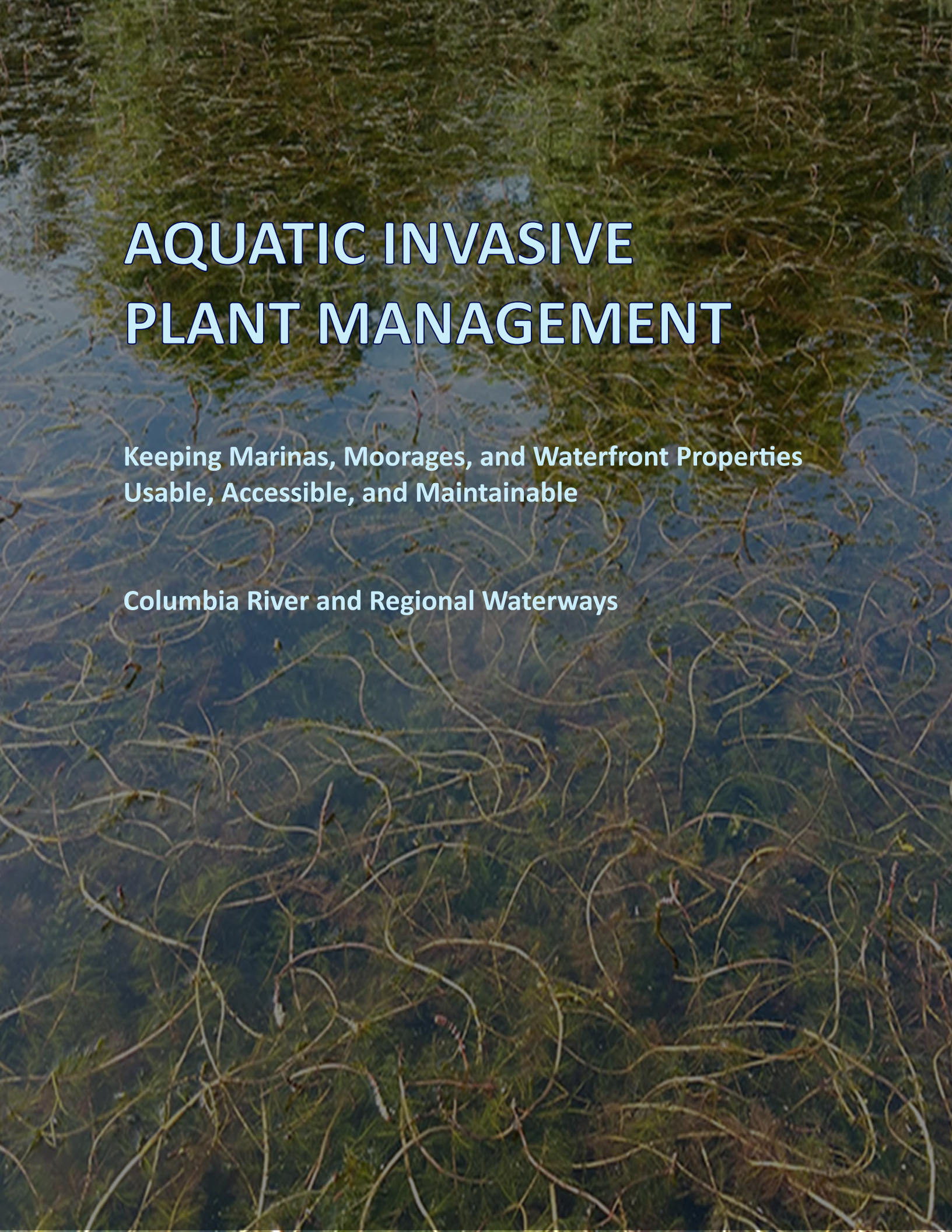


AQUATIC INVASIVE PLANT MANAGEMENT

Keeping Marinas, Moorages, and Waterfront Properties Usable, Accessible, and Maintainable

Columbia River and Regional Waterways

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Regional Overview and Management Framework

Aquatic invasive plants are a growing issue across marinas, moorages, floating home communities, and private waterfront properties throughout the Columbia River system. Left unmanaged, these plants restrict boat access, clog propellers, damage equipment, and create ongoing maintenance headaches for property owners and operators.
This guide outlines what is happening, why it matters for your property, and the most practical ways to keep your docks, slips, and access points usable throughout the season.



Eurasian watermilfoil

Problem Overview



In the Columbia River region, vegetation commonly accumulates in marina basins, around docks, between slips, floating home communities, slough channels, and other sheltered areas where it directly impacts daily use and operations. These issues quickly become costly operational and maintenance problems for property owners—reducing access, increasing upkeep, and disrupting use for tenants, members, and boat owners.

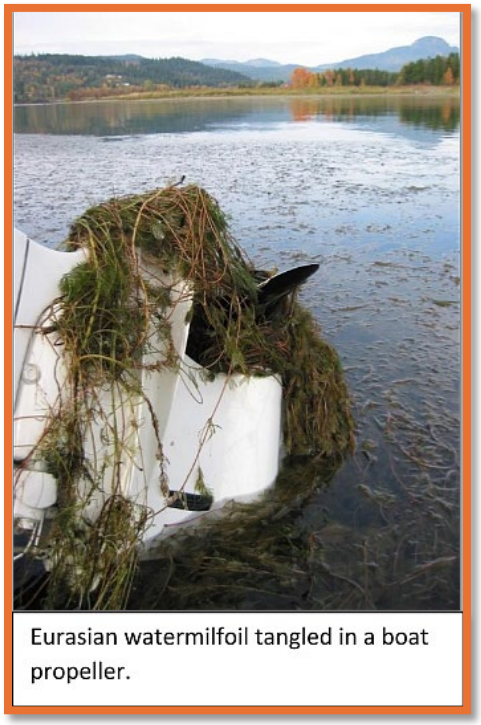
For example, plants such as Eurasian watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*), commonly referred to as milfoil, and hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillata*) can grow up to 1 inch per day during peak summer conditions, allowing dense plant beds to develop within weeks. Many species spread through fragmentation, meaning even small plant pieces can establish new infestations downstream.

Once established, management focuses on keeping priority areas accessible and reducing vegetation around marinas, boat launches, docks, and shoreline infrastructure.

Effective river-based vegetation management requires marine access, diver-based removal capability, material handling, and the ability to operate safely around docks, launches, floating structures, and active waterways. Few contractors in this region combine these capabilities into a single service.

How Aquatic Invasive Plants Impact Waterfront Properties

- Boats cannot get in/out of slips
- Props and jet drives get fouled → repairs + downtime
- Tenant and member satisfaction and retention may decline
- Docks, lines, and infrastructure get tangled or damaged
- Ongoing maintenance costs increase year after year
- Property becomes more difficult to manage and less attractive to tenants, members, and potential buyers



Eurasian watermilfoil tangled in a boat propeller.



About Sampson Built Solutions

Sampson Built Solutions, Inc. is a Southwest Washington–based contractor serving the Columbia River region and Northwest Oregon. We perform marine and construction work in overwater, shoreline, and limited-access environments.

We work directly with marina owners, moorage operators, waterfront HOAs, and private property owners to solve access, maintenance, and infrastructure challenges in active waterways.

Experience in safety-critical operations includes service on the Clark County Sheriff's Office Search & Rescue Team.

Core Services

- Diver-assisted plant removal (DASH and manual)
- Benthic barrier installation
- Marine access and work platforms
- Work around docks, marinas, and waterfront infrastructure
- Underwater inspection and condition assessments
- Debris removal and limited-access site work



Operational Capability

Work is performed by trained dive personnel using purpose-built equipment for aquatic vegetation removal and work around active waterfront infrastructure.

- 28-foot pontoon work platform
- Diver-assisted suction harvesting (DASH) systems
- Benthic barrier installation
- Standard crew: diver, tender, and vessel operator

Aquatic Plant Growth and Conditions





Typical growth characteristics include:

- Eurasian watermilfoil can grow up to 1 inch per day during peak summer conditions
- Hydrilla can grow several inches per day and form dense surface canopies
- Parrotfeather spreads rapidly along shorelines through stem fragments
- Fanwort can form dense submerged beds within a single growing season
- Growth depth is primarily limited by sunlight penetration.

Typical conditions in Pacific Northwest waterways include:

- Dense infestations commonly occurring in 6–15 feet of water
- Plant growth occurring up to approximately 30 feet deep in clear water

This depth range is important when evaluating vegetation control methods because some mechanical techniques only remove vegetation in the upper portion of the water column.

Why the Columbia River System Is Vulnerable

Invasive aquatic plants spread quickly in the Columbia River system due to:

- Shallow, slow-moving water in sloughs, marinas, and backwater areas
- Sunlight reaching the riverbed, supporting deep plant growth
- Nutrient-rich sediments and warm summer conditions
- Connected waterways that allow constant reintroduction

Common high-risk areas include:

Washington

- Vancouver Lake
- Lake River system
- Columbia River backwater sloughs
- Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge waterways

Oregon

- Multnomah Channel
- Columbia Slough system
- Sauvie Island lakes and wetlands
- Portland Harbor backwater areas

Because these waterways are connected, infestations are rarely isolated. Plants spread through currents, boat traffic, and fragments, allowing growth to reestablish quickly across the system.

Seasonal Strategy for Aquatic Vegetation Management

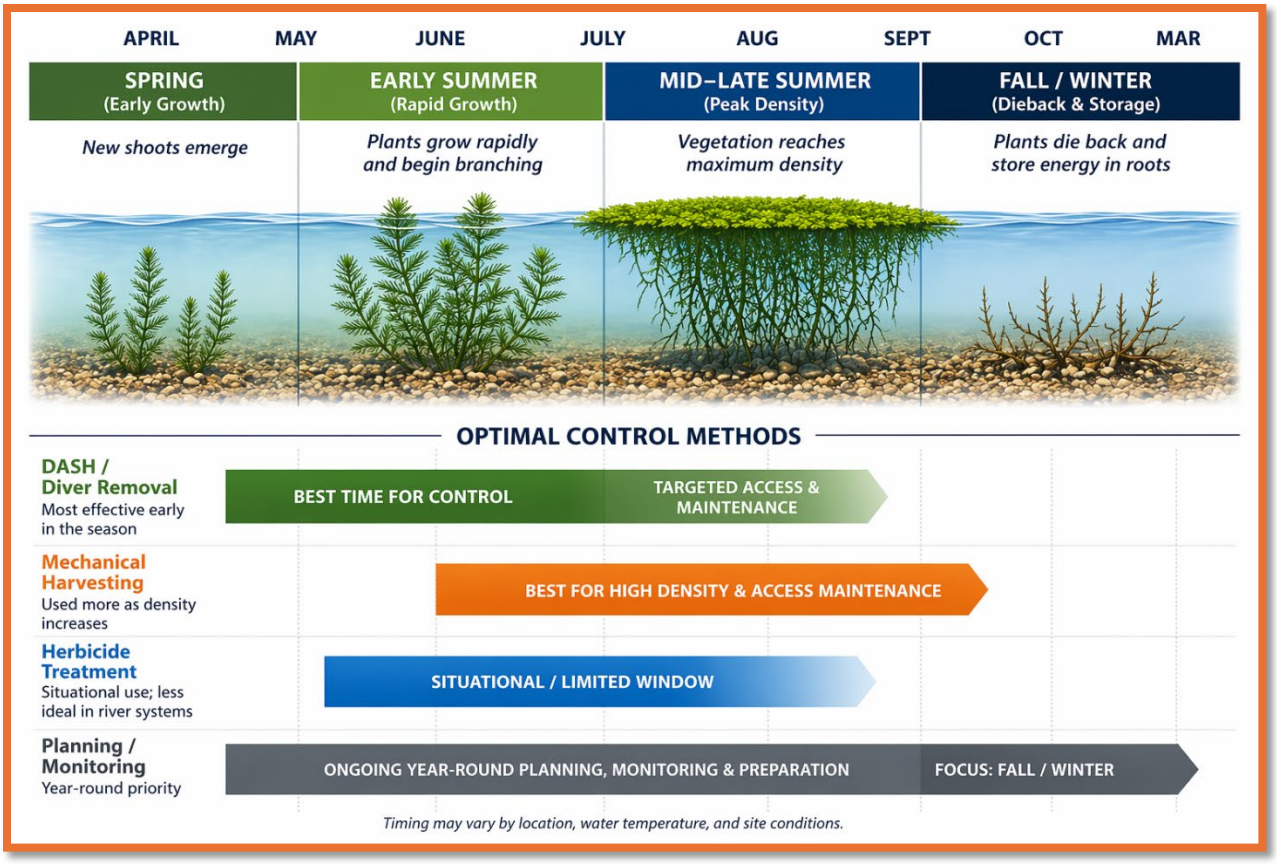
Understanding seasonal growth patterns helps determine when control methods are most effective. The table below shows how conditions change throughout the year and how management strategies should adapt.

Season	Conditions	Recommended Approach	Why It Matters
Spring ***(April – Early June)***	*Early growth;* new shoots emerge as water temperatures increase.	• DASH • Manual diver removal • Benthic barriers	Prevents surface growth and fragmentation; most cost-effective time to act
Early Summer ***(June – July)***	*Rapid growth;* plants extend toward the surface and begin branching.	• DASH for targeted removal • Limited mechanical harvesting for access	Still manageable before peak density; effective control is still achievable
Mid to Late Summer ***(July – September)***	*Peak density;* vegetation reaches maximum biomass and often forms dense surface mats.	• DASH for targeted access • Mechanical harvesting for temporary navigation	Maintaining access becomes the priority; higher time and cost due to density
Fall / Winter ***(September – March)***	*Dieback and storage;* vegetation declines while storing energy in root systems.	• Monitoring and mapping • Planning next season's work	Supports planning for early-season control; no active growth to remove

Cost and Timing Considerations

Early-season management is typically more effective and less costly than addressing dense, established vegetation later in the season.

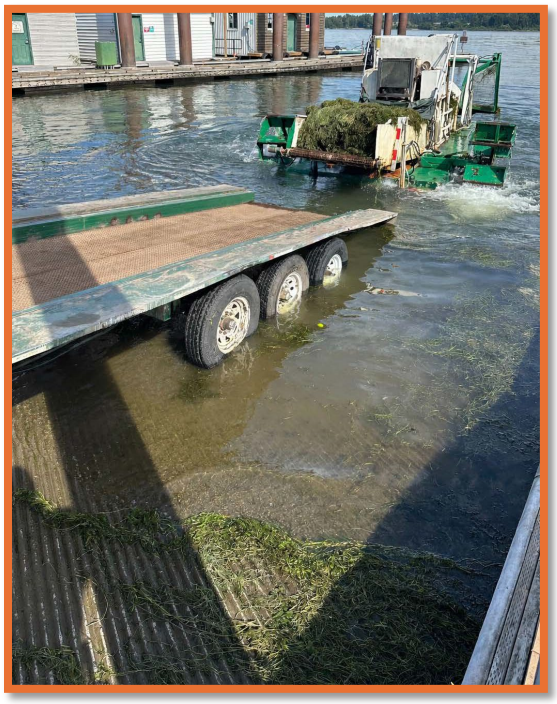
- Smaller infestations are faster and easier to remove
- Early removal reduces fragmentation and downstream spread
- Helps prevent formation of dense surface mats
- Can significantly reduce the scale and cost of later treatment



As vegetation reaches peak growth in mid to late summer, control efforts often shift from prevention to maintaining access, which typically requires more time and resources.

Characteristics and Spread

Most invasive aquatic plants spread through fragmentation. Small plant pieces drift with currents and establish new colonies when they settle and root in sediment.





Common spread mechanisms include:

- Boat propellers and jet drives
- Boat trailers and equipment
- Water currents
- Mechanical cutting operations

Because of this fragmentation-based reproduction, disturbance of vegetation beds can accelerate the spread of infestations.

Management Methods

Different properties require different approaches depending on layout, usage, and how severe the infestation is. No single method is effective in all conditions. Most projects require a combination of approaches based on waterbody type, infestation level, and operational priorities.

A. Monitoring / No-Action Approach
B. Dredging / Rototilling
C. Mechanical Harvesting
D. Diver Assisted Suction Harvesting (DASH)
E. Benthic Barriers (Lake Mats)
F. Diver Manual Removal
G. Herbicide Treatment
H. Biological Control
I. Integrated Management Approach

Why Management Method Matters:

- Some methods improve access short-term but increase long-term spread
- Fragmentation can shift problems downstream
- Repeated treatments increase long-term cost and workload
- Targeted removal can reduce future maintenance
- Rivers: current, fragmentation risk, constant reintroduction
- Lakes: more controlled conditions; herbicides and harvesting more viable

A. Monitoring and No-Action Approach

Description

In some situations, agencies may choose to monitor conditions rather than take immediate action. This approach is typically used when infestations are small, impacts are limited, or additional assessment is needed before selecting a control method.

Advantages

- Low immediate cost
- No disturbance to sediment or habitat
- Allows time to assess site conditions and trends
- Supports data-driven decision making

Disadvantages

- Vegetation may continue to spread if left unmanaged
- Can lead to larger, more costly treatment later
- Does not improve current access or navigation conditions
- Moves into new areas (slips → fairways → access lanes)
- Increases maintenance and complaints

Application

Commonly used for early-stage infestations, low-impact areas, or locations where access and safety are not immediately affected.

Efficacy

Does not remove vegetation. Effectiveness depends on early detection and timely transition to active management if conditions worsen.

Longevity

Short-term approach. Most infestations require active management over time as plants spread or reestablish.

Summary

Monitoring is a useful first step in managing aquatic vegetation, particularly in low-impact or early-stage conditions. However, because invasive plants spread quickly, delaying action can increase long-term cost and complexity.

B. Dredging / Rototilling

Description
Dredging or rototilling involves mechanically disturbing or removing sediment to disrupt plant growth and root systems. These methods are typically performed using specialized equipment operating below the water surface.

Advantages

- Can remove or disrupt root systems
- May provide temporary reduction in vegetation density
- Can be used for sediment or channel modification in certain projects

Disadvantages

- High sediment disturbance and turbidity
- Can impact water quality and aquatic habitat
- Often requires extensive permitting and environmental review
- Vegetation frequently regrows if roots or fragments remain
- Not well suited for targeted work around docks or infrastructure

Application
Used in limited situations such as sediment management or channel modification. Not commonly used for routine aquatic vegetation control in active waterways.

Efficacy
Variable. While root systems may be disrupted, plant fragments and remaining material can allow regrowth.

Longevity
Typically short- to medium-term results depending on site conditions and follow-up management.

Summary
Dredging and rototilling can reduce vegetation in specific situations but are generally not practical for targeted control in river systems due to sediment disturbance, regulatory requirements, and potential for regrowth.

C. Mechanical Harvesting

Description

Mechanical harvesting uses specialized vessels equipped with underwater cutting blades that cut vegetation below the water surface and convey it onto the vessel for removal. Harvesters typically cut vegetation at depths of 5–10 feet. **Vegetation growing below this cutting depth generally remains intact.**

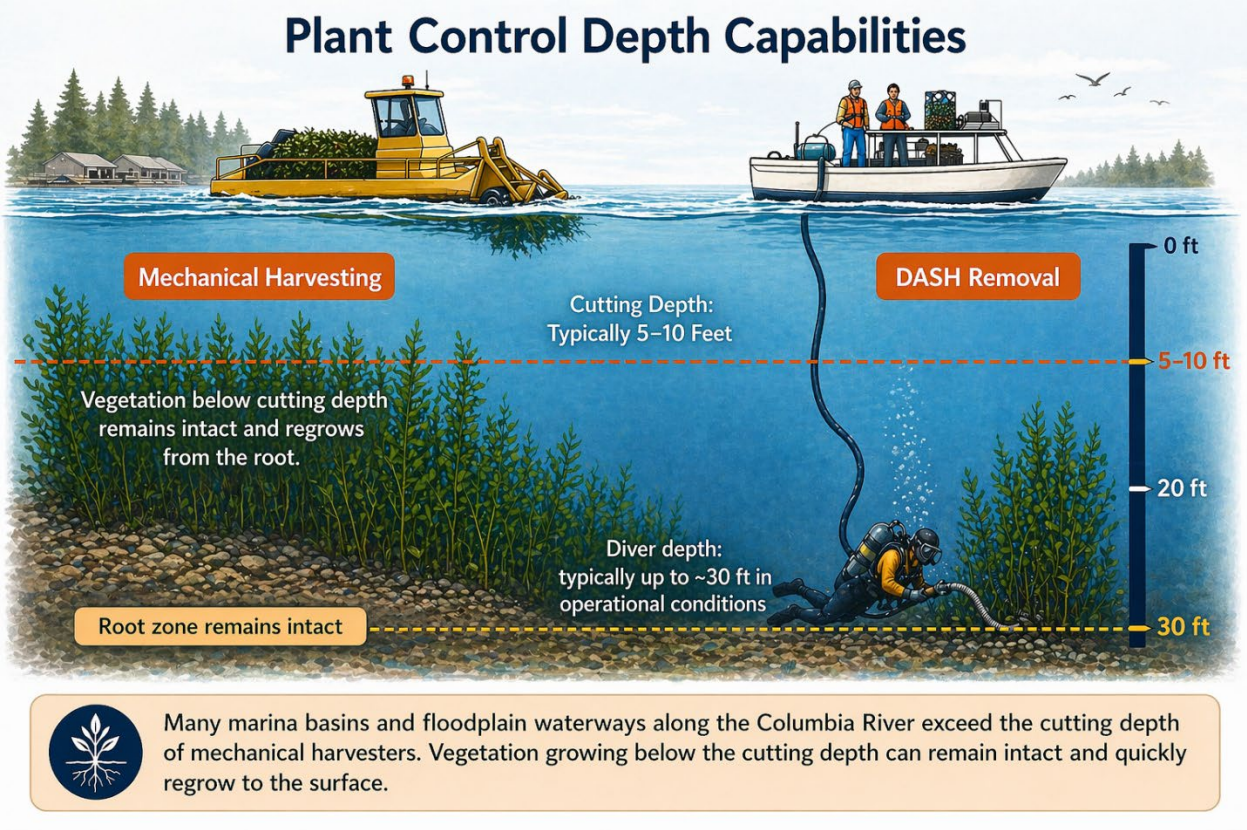


Advantages

- Removes large volumes of vegetation quickly in open water
- Provides immediate visual clearing of plant beds
- Can temporarily improve navigation in heavily infested areas
- Minimal chemical concerns

Disadvantages

- Cutting depth limited to 5–10 feet
- Removes native vegetation along with invasive plants
- Cutting blades fragment plants such as watermilfoil and hydrilla
- Root systems remain intact and allow rapid regrowth
- Harvesting equipment may injure fish and other organisms
- Equipment is difficult to operate around docks and debris



Application

Typically used in large, open-water areas where rapid, temporary clearing is needed to restore navigation access.

Efficacy

Harvesters can clear 1–2 acres per day, depending on plant density.

Longevity

Mechanical harvesting typically provides short-term relief. Vegetation often regrows within several weeks during peak growing conditions.

Summary

Mechanical harvesting can provide immediate, short-term relief in heavily infested areas. However, because it does not remove root systems and can increase fragmentation, repeated treatment is typically required and downstream spread can still occur.

D. Diver Assisted Suction Harvesting (DASH)

Description

DASH is a targeted removal method in which divers remove invasive plants by the root. A suction system transports plant material and fragments to the surface where they are captured and contained for disposal. All removed vegetation is contained, transported off-site, dried, and composted to prevent reintroduction.

Advantages



- Removes entire plant including root system
- Operates deeper than mechanical harvesters
- Highly selective removal of invasive species
- Captures fragments before they spread
- Minimal disturbance to surrounding sediment
- Effective around docks, marinas, and shoreline infrastructure

Disadvantages

- Slower than harvesting for large infestations
- Requires trained dive personnel and specialized equipment

Application

Often used in marina basins, floating home communities, boat launches, and environmentally sensitive areas.

Efficacy

Two-person teams typically remove 200–600 square feet per hour. Productivity varies based on density, but DASH is designed to deliver long-term results in high-priority areas—not just speed.

Longevity

Because plants are removed by the root and fragments are captured, regrowth is significantly reduced and follow-up work is often lower in later seasons.

Summary

DASH is a targeted method that removes invasive plants at the root while capturing fragments to prevent spread. It is particularly effective in marinas, boat launches, and other confined areas where reliable access is the priority. While slower than mechanical harvesting in large infestations, DASH often provides longer-lasting results with less follow-up work.

E. Benthic Barriers (Lake Mats)

Description

Benthic barriers are sheets of fabric or synthetic material placed on the lake or river bottom to block sunlight and prevent plant growth.

Advantages



- Non-chemical vegetation control
- Immediate suppression beneath barrier
- Effective in small, high-use areas

Disadvantages

- Eliminates all vegetation beneath barrier
- Requires inspection and maintenance
- Sediment accumulation may allow growth on top
- Limited to small areas

Application

Most effective in small, defined areas such as boat launches, swim zones, marina slips, and around docks or shoreline infrastructure.

Efficacy

Barriers can eliminate up to 99% of vegetation beneath the barrier.

Longevity

Typically remain effective 2–5 years, depending on maintenance.

Summary

Benthic barriers provide reliable, longer-term suppression in targeted areas but are not practical for large-scale treatment. Best used in combination with other methods to maintain access in high-use locations.

F. Diver Manual Removal

Description

Manual removal involves divers physically removing plants using hand tools. Vegetation must be captured in containment bags to prevent fragments from drifting.



Advantages

- Highly selective removal
- Minimal ecological disturbance
- Low equipment cost

Disadvantages

- Labor intensive
- Slow compared with other methods
- Impractical for large infestations

Application

Used for early-stage infestations, small patches, or sensitive areas where precise, selective removal is required.

Efficacy

Watermilfoil populations may decline 67% after one year and up to 97% after several seasons when roots are removed.

Longevity

Because plants are removed by the root and fragments are captured during removal, regrowth is significantly reduced.

Summary

Manual removal is effective for small infestations and early intervention but becomes impractical as vegetation density and coverage increase.

G. Herbicide Treatment

Description

Aquatic herbicides are chemical compounds applied directly to the waterbody to control invasive plants.

Advantages



- Can treat large areas relatively quickly
- May be effective for widespread infestations

Disadvantages

- May affect non-target vegetation
- Requires permitting and regulatory approval
- Water-use restrictions may apply
- Dead vegetation remains until decomposition

Application

Often used in lakes, reservoirs, and slow-moving waterways.

Efficacy

Effectiveness varies by species, application method, and environmental conditions. It can provide broad control in suitable conditions but may not fully eliminate root systems.

Longevity

Many infestations require repeat treatments annually.

Summary

Herbicide treatment can be effective for large-scale infestations in controlled water bodies but is generally less suitable for river systems due to flow, regulatory requirements, and potential impacts on non-target species.

H. Biological Controls

Description

Biological control uses natural organisms to reduce plant populations. Examples include aquatic insects that feed on invasive plants or sterile grass carp that consume vegetation.

Advantages

- Low chemical impact
- Can reduce vegetation density over time

Disadvantages

- Results may take multiple seasons
- May be difficult to source organisms
- Limited control over feeding behavior
- Effectiveness varies with environmental conditions

Application

Used in larger water bodies where gradual, long-term vegetation reduction is acceptable and immediate improvements to navigation or access are not required.

Efficacy

Variable. Results depend on species used, environmental conditions, and time. Noticeable reduction may take multiple seasons.

Longevity

Long-term influence on plant populations is possible, but outcomes are unpredictable and difficult to control.

Summary

Biological control can support long-term vegetation management but is not a primary solution for maintaining navigation or access in active waterways.


Milfoil Weevil

I. Integrated Management Approach

Description

Aquatic vegetation is typically managed using a combination of methods selected based on site conditions, infestation size, and operational priorities.

Advantages

- Matches methods to site-specific conditions
- Improves effectiveness over single method approaches
- Supports both immediate access and long-term control

Disadvantages

- Requires planning and coordination
- May involve multiple treatment phases

Application

Used in most real-world projects where multiple methods are combined to address varying site conditions, priorities, and infestation levels.

Efficacy

High when methods are selected and timed properly. Combining targeted removal with maintenance strategies improves overall effectiveness.

Longevity

Provides the most sustainable long-term results by balancing immediate access needs with ongoing control and maintenance.

Summary

Most effective programs combine targeted removal with ongoing maintenance to keep priority areas accessible and reduce long-term workload.

Budget Planning and Typical Project Costs

Project costs for aquatic vegetation management vary based on site conditions, infestation level, and access. The ranges below reflect typical pricing for private marinas, moorages, floating home communities, and waterfront properties in the Columbia River region.

Diver-Assisted Suction Harvesting (DASH)

Minimum Project Cost
Most projects have a minimum mobilization cost of approximately $2,500–$3,500 depending on location and setup requirements. *This includes crew mobilization, vessel transport, equipment setup, and site staging required to safely access and perform the work.*

Typical Pricing Structure

- Crew + vessel day rate: $3,500 – $5,500 per day *(includes dive crew, boat, and equipment)*
- ~200–600 sq ft/hour depending on density

Typical Site-Based Pricing

- Small dock / boathouse / single frontage: $2,500 – $8,000
- Cluster of slips / small moorage section: $5,000 – $20,000
- Marina sections / fairways: $10,000 – $35,000+

Use Case
Targeted removal in areas where reliable access, usability, and long-term control are important.

Benthic Barrier Installation

Minimum Project Cost
Minimum mobilization costs apply, as installation requires crew, vessel access, and setup similar to other marine work.

Typical Installed Pricing

- Standard conditions: $5 – $9 per sq ft
- Complex conditions: $9 – $14+ per sq ft (complex installs, depth, anchoring challenges)

Typical Project Ranges

- Individual slips / dock sections: $5,000 – $25,000
- Boat ramps / access zones: $10,000 – $50,000
- Larger marina areas: $30,000 – $100,000+

Use Case
Maintaining consistently clear areas such as slips, docks, and high-use access points.

Factors That Affect Cost

- Plant density and coverage
- Water depth, visibility, and current
- Layout of docks, slips, and structures
- Access limitations for equipment and crew
- Amount of material handling and disposal required
- Timing within the growing season

Planning Note

Smaller, early-stage infestations are typically faster and less expensive to address.
Waiting until peak growth often increases both time and cost due to density and spread.

Most projects benefit from a combination of targeted removal and ongoing maintenance to keep costs predictable over time.

Private projects are often more cost-effective because they do not have the prevailing wage, certified payroll, and bonding requirements typically associated with public or municipal projects. Pricing is based on actual site conditions and the most efficient approach for your property.

Control Method Comparison

Control Method	Typical Working Depth	Removal Rate	Regrowth Characteristics	Operational Considerations
Mechanical Harvesting	Typically 5–10 ft	~1–2 acres/day depending on plant density	Root systems remain intact. Plants often regrow within several weeks. Fragmentation can spread Eurasian watermilfoil, hydrilla, and fanwort.	Large equipment difficult to operate near docks, floating homes, debris, and shallow sloughs. Typically requires repeated cutting throughout the growing season.
Diver Assisted Suction Harvesting (DASH)	30+ ft	~200–600 sq ft/hour per two-person team	Plants removed by the root. Fragmentation captured during removal. Treated areas typically require less follow-up work in later seasons.	Highly effective in marinas, boat launches, shoreline infrastructure, and other confined environments.
Benthic Barriers (Lake Mats)	Installed directly on bottom	Immediate suppression beneath barrier	Vegetation eliminated beneath barrier. Regrowth may occur if barriers are removed or sediment accumulates.	Typically limited to small areas such as boat ramps and swim zones. Requires periodic inspection and maintenance.
Manual Diver Removal	Limited primarily by diver depth capability	Highly variable depending on plant density	When roots are removed, watermilfoil populations may decline ~67% after one year. Up to ~97% reduction after multiple seasons of treatment.	Labor intensive. Typically used for small infestations or targeted removal.
Herbicide Treatment	Entire treated water column	Large areas treated quickly	Effectiveness varies by species and treatment conditions. Repeat treatments are often required annually.	Requires permitting and regulatory approval. Public and environmental concerns may limit use in some areas.
Biological Control	Entire waterbody	Slow population-based control	May take multiple seasons before noticeable vegetation reduction occurs.	Effectiveness varies widely depending on environmental conditions.

Common Situations and Recommended Approaches

Situation	Best Approach	Best Time of Year
Boat ramp or access point blocked	DASH + mats	Spring through early summer (ideal) / anytime for immediate access
Slips / moorage areas	DASH	Spring (best) / early summer before peak density
Early-stage growth around docks	Diver removal	Early spring (before spread and fragmentation)
Ongoing property maintenance	DASH + mats	Install in spring, maintain throughout season

Why DASH Works Best for Properties Like Yours

- Works in moving water where other methods struggle
- Removes roots and captures fragments
- Limits spread within and beyond the property
- Effective in confined, high-priority areas such as docks, slips, and structures
- Improves access immediately and lasts longer

For example, a marina with heavy growth between slips can use DASH to clear fairways and access lanes, combined with benthic barriers in individual slips to keep high-use areas consistently clear.

Material Handling and Disposal

Vegetation removed during control operations must be contained and removed from the water to prevent fragments from reestablishing downstream.

Typical handling practices include:

- Capturing plant material during removal (DASH or manual)
- Containing material in bags or onboard storage
- Transporting vegetation to shore for staging
- Drying and composting or disposing of material off-site

Proper handling is critical because many invasive plants can regrow from small fragments. Containment and removal help reduce downstream spread and improve long-term effectiveness of treatment efforts.

Monitoring and Maintenance

Overview

Aquatic vegetation management is typically an ongoing process rather than a one-time treatment. Because waterways are connected, invasive plants are continuously reintroduced through currents, boat traffic, and nearby infestations.

Why Maintenance Matters

- Keeps high-use areas clear and accessible
- Allows early detection of new growth
- Reduces need for large-scale removal over time
- Supports consistent, predictable operating conditions

Considerations

- Requires ongoing planning and coordination
- Involves recurring effort and cost
- Does not replace the need for targeted removal when infestations develop

Role in Management Programs

Monitoring and maintenance programs support long-term vegetation control by identifying issues early and maintaining treated areas. Most successful programs combine targeted removal with ongoing monitoring to reduce future workload and cost.

Frequently Asked Questions

What permits are required for aquatic vegetation removal?
Permitting requirements vary based on the method, location, and project scope. Many projects require coordination with state and federal agencies. Requirements are typically identified during project planning.

What happens to the vegetation after removal?
Plant material is contained during removal, transported to shore, and disposed of through drying, burning, or composting to prevent reintroduction into the waterway.

How often is treatment required?
Aquatic vegetation management is ongoing. Most areas require periodic monitoring and follow-up treatment to maintain access and prevent regrowth.

Can work be performed around docks and infrastructure?
Yes. Targeted methods such as diver-assisted removal and benthic barriers are specifically suited for work around docks, marinas, and other waterfront structures.

How long will results last?
Results vary by method, site conditions, and level of infestation. Methods that remove plants by the root, such as diver-assisted removal (DASH), typically provide longer-lasting results with reduced regrowth. Methods that cut vegetation without removing roots may require more frequent follow-up to maintain access.

What factors affect project cost?
Project cost is influenced by several factors, including infestation density, water depth, site conditions (visibility, current, debris), access limitations, and the method used. Targeting smaller areas early in the growth cycle can often reduce overall cost compared to addressing dense, established vegetation later in the season.

Does removing vegetation make the problem worse?
Some methods can increase fragmentation and downstream spread. Targeted removal methods that capture fragments help reduce this risk.

Why not just remove everything?
Complete removal is typically not practical or desirable. Most management focuses on maintaining access and reducing vegetation in priority areas.

Will treatment harm fish or other wildlife?
Impacts vary by method. Targeted approaches such as DASH and benthic barriers limit disturbance when performed correctly, while broader methods like harvesting or herbicides may have wider effects depending on conditions. Method selection balances effectiveness with environmental considerations.

Getting Started with Sampson Built Solutions

Managing aquatic vegetation starts with understanding your site and choosing the right approach. The process is straightforward and tailored to your specific conditions.

1. Initial Conversation

We review your site, problem areas, and priorities:

- Launches, marinas, navigation routes, shoreline
- Vegetation type and density
- Timing and seasonal considerations

2. Site Evaluation

A field review helps determine:

- Extent of infestation
- Water depth, visibility, and current
- Access and safety constraints

3. Recommended Approach

We match the method to the site:

- DASH for targeted, root-level removal
- Benthic barriers for maintaining clear areas
- Manual removal for small or early infestations
- Combined approaches where needed

4. Scope, Budget, and Schedule

You receive a clear project outline of:

- Work areas and priorities
- Recommended methods & timeline
- Budget ranges based on site conditions, access, and overall project scope

5. Implementation

Work is performed with trained personnel and proper containment to prevent spread and maintain safe access during operations.

The best time to address aquatic vegetation is before peak summer growth. Early action is typically faster, more effective, and less expensive than addressing dense, established vegetation later in the season.

If your docks, slips, or access areas are becoming harder to use—or you want to stay ahead of it before it becomes a bigger problem—we can take a look and walk you through your options.

START THE CONVERSATION

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