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Fort Custer Recreation Area Lakes Study Underway

AUGUSTA, Michigan – August 20, 2018 – The Fort Custer Recreation Area (FCRA) Lakes Enhancement Project kicked off this summer at the 3,000-acre state park located in Augusta, Michigan. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is working with Kieser & Associates (K&A), an environmental science and engineering firm in Kalamazoo, along with the Kalamazoo River Watershed Council (KRWC), Aquest Corporation, Aquatic Services, Inc. and EnviroScience to develop and implement an integrated lake management plan for three lakes in the FCRA (Eagle, Whitford-Lawler and Jackson Hole). The project is funded through the Natural Resource Damage Assessment as part of the settlement levied against Enbridge Energy in connection with the July 2010 oil release on Line 6B into the Kalamazoo River.

The purpose of the three-year project is to enhance the habitat of FCRA lakes by managing aquatic invasive species (AIS) found in the lakes. The project includes public outreach and education on AIS.

K&A conducted aquatic plant surveys in early summer of 2018 to assess plant communities in each lake. Invasive species were found in all the lakes at FCRA. Eurasian watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) was found in over 50 acres of the main portion of Eagle Lake and over much of its 22-acre lobe and connecting channel. Starry stonewort (*Nitellopsis obtusa*), purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) and Phragmites (*Phragmites australis*) were also found in and around the FCRA lakes.

One of the major problems with AIS is that they can be very opportunistic, spreading rapidly and outcompeting the native species resulting in diminished plant diversity within a lake. A diverse plant community is important for a healthy ecosystem as it supports a wide variety of fish, aquatic insects and other wildlife.

Several treatment options are being used to control AIS in these lakes. Some areas are being treated with traditional



(Eurasian watermilfoil in Eagle Lake)

chemical herbicides in controlled amounts by Aquatic Services, a State-certified chemical applicator. Herbicides can be an effective option in controlling large infestations of Eurasian watermilfoil and Phragmites that have been observed in the FCRA lakes.



(Starry stonewort "pillow" in Whitford-Lawler Lake)

Another technique being used for managing invasive species is biological control. Biological controls can be used to reduce aquatic invasive plant species by introducing a natural enemy or predator specific to the target species. For the FCRA project, K&A, with assistance from EnviroScience, reared and released over 20,000 eggs and larvae of a small aquatic weevil (Euhrychiopsis lecontei) into the smaller 22-acre lobe of Eagle Lake. This weevil is a natural predator of Eurasian watermilfoil. The adult weevils are small aquatic insects, less than 1/8th of an inch in size. The larval and

adult stages of the weevil eat the Eurasian watermilfoil stems, weakening the plant and limiting its spread. This can help native plants to re-establish. The effectiveness of this biological control will be compared to the chemical control results to guide future management options.



(K&A staff stocking weevils at Fort Custer)

The other biological control agent used at FCRA is a beetle (*Galerucella calmariensis*) that feeds exclusively on purple loosestrife, weakening the plant and reducing its spread. Both the adult and the larval stages of this insect damage this invasive plant. K&A reared an estimated 15,000 beetles for the July release at FCRA. Both the weevils and the beetles overwinter along the shorelines and will re-emerge next year.

Patty Hoch-Melluish of K&A said of the project, "The DNR was interested in looking at an integrated approach to lake management at Fort Custer. We are using a variety of controls to help determine the best long-term, cost-effective options for invasive species management for these lakes. We are working closely with our project partners to develop a sustainable approach to improve habitat and recreational opportunities on the lakes by controlling AIS. We are excited to be leading this important project."



(K&A staff releasing beetles at Fort Custer)

This project also involves a public outreach and educational component to help park visitors understand their role in preventing the spread of AIS in the FCRA and in other water bodies. The Michigan DNR along with the KRWC are providing programs for the public to raise awareness about AIS. Working with the DNR Park Explorers Program, the KRWC will host a Recreation 101 class at FCRA later this month to show people how to inspect and clean their boats and fishing equipment when traveling to other lakes.

The Fort Custer Recreation Area (FCRA) Lakes Enhancement Project is a three-year effort that will continue through 2020. The final product will be a comprehensive lakes management plan that the Michigan DNR will continue to implement to maintain a balanced plant community, improve the habitat in the lakes and provide increased recreational opportunities for park users.