

Green Monster: Invasive Brazilian Weed Chokes U.S. Lakes

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Description

Giant Salvinia, an aquatic weed native to the Brazilian rainforest, infests 50 U.S. U.S.; a handful can grow to cover 40 acres of water surface in less than a month -- and no one knows how to kill it.

Keywords

Giant Salvinia, Weed, Lake, Water Surface, Infestation, Rapid Growth, Invasive Species, Rainforest, Brazil, Boat Trailers, Netting, Water Fence, Chemical Weedkiller, Burning, Blow Torch, Cypress Bog, Property Values, Waterfront Property, Swimming, Cado Lake, Texas, Salvinia Task Force, The Alamo, Lake Bistineau, Louisiana, South Carolina, Aquatic Plants

Transcript

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BRIAN WILLIAMS, anchor:

This time of year the beautiful lakes that dot the American countryside, the lakes that should be filled with swimmers normally, are filled with something else. It's a nasty problem that has nothing to do with pollution or motor boats, but is nonetheless killing life in the water. Tonight NBC's Don Teague tells us about one community that's refusing to go down without a fight.

DON TEAGUE reporting:

You're looking at an act of desperation.

Unidentified Man #1: We're running out extensions.

TEAGUE: A two-mile fence spanning Caddo Lake in northeast Texas, a last-ditch effort to stop an invasion.

Mr. JACK CANSON (Caddo Lake Salvinia Task Force): What we're trying to do at Caddo Lake is be--is draw a line in the sand, like at the Alamo, saying, "You're not going past us without a--without a fight to the end."

TEAGUE: What they're fighting at Caddo Lake isn't a who but a what.

Mr. CANSON: That's a handful of it.

TEAGUE: A ferocious weed called giant salvinia.

Unidentified Man #2: It'll just bust apart and make new plants.

TEAGUE: It grows so thick on the water's surface, it eventually kills everything below it. Giant salvinia is native to Brazilian rainforests.

Mr. CANSON: See, it's starting to push up on itself.

TEAGUE: It first appeared in South Carolina 12 years ago and grows so fast a handful can expand to 40 acres in less than a month.

Unidentified Man #3: This is the most sinister aquatic plant I've ever dealt with. It just takes no prisoners.

TEAGUE: It spreads from lake to lake by boat trailers and has now infested more than 50 lakes from Virginia to California, including Lake Bistineau in Louisiana.

Mr. RICHARD ELLIOTT: There goes my business.

TEAGUE: Where Richard Elliott's waterfront RV park is now a "weedfront" money pit.

Mr. ELLIOTT: I've got all the investment in the cabins, all the investment in the RV park, and I'm stuck.

TEAGUE: The plant's latest victim, Caddo Lake...

Mr. ROBERT SPEIGHT (Lake Resident): When I saw it here, I knew we were in for a long, tough battle.

TEAGUE: ...where this fence will hopefully keep the weed confined to a cyprus bog, where it was first spotted six months ago.

The problem with this stuff is there's no easy way to get rid of it. Chemical weed killers have limited effect. They've even tried burning it.

But even a blowtorch won't kill it, meaning hundreds of lakes across the country are at risk. And for now, the future of Caddo Lake hangs on two miles of orange netting. Don Teague, NBC News, Caddo Lake, Texas.

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In 1990, the salmon industry in the Pacific Northwest is threatened when salmon in hatcheries and fish farms are infected with a virus, and killed to prevent its spread. (The virus is harmless to humans.)

