

# Protecting the pond

Volunteers pull  
invasive plants  
from reservoir

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SALEM — Nancy Moore and Alan Mahan jumped off the side of the Moore's pontoon boat on the morning of Sept. 16 in their scuba diving gear and sank to the bottom of Arlington Pond.

Netted bags in their gloved hands, they combed the bottom, ripping out invasive plants in an effort to create a better ecological balance and maintain water quality, Mahan said.

Surfacing, the divers handed off their bags to kayaker Bob Matarazzo who transported them back to the boat where volunteers Melody Lynn, Joan Borges and Pat Conway rinsed the invasive species and stuffed them into a trash bag.

"The pond has had a problem with invasive weeds for years," Lynn said. "The first herbicide treatment was done in 2022, but it didn't work as intended and the invasive weeds spread significantly after treatment."

Officially known as the

Arlington Mill Reservoir, the 269-acre impoundment along the Spicket River is Salem's largest and most recreational lake. It also serves as the back-up water supply for Salem.

At the recommendation of the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES), the Arlington Pond Protective Association (APPA) formed a team of volunteer weed control divers and tenders to help remove and maintain invasive weeds in the pond, which include milfoil, fanwort and naiad.

In compliance with the NHDES, the divers are trained in invasive weed removal so as not to remove natural plants.

"Starting this summer, five divers have been recruited to regularly dive and pull weeds from the lake," Lynn said. "Good progress has been made."

The team has been diving in an area of the pond called "Sherlie's Cove," nicknamed for one of the homeowners. Throughout the summer and over the course of 17 dives, more than 2,400 gallons of invasive weeds have been removed from the area so far.

"We've cleaned it out," Mahan said. "It's encouraging

to swim down there and not see anything."

Working away from the shoreline of the cove, Matarazzo followed near the divers in his kayak, moving the dive flag farther out into the waterway as Mahan and Moore sought deeper depths and denser pockets of weeds. Back on the boat, the volunteers used a skimmer to pick up pieces of the plants that broke off during transport.

"They will sink and grow a new plant," Mahan said.

"It will take years to remove them all from the pond."

Each year, the team will return to the pond to maintain the weedless areas and start clearing new ones while they look to recruit more divers and volunteers to work across the 269-acre pond.

"We have more funding now to get another person certified," Lynn said.

On the other side of the pond, out of view from Tuesday's team, a professional Diver Assisted Suction

Harvesting (DASH) diving company hired in part by NHDES, APPA and the Town of Salem for 20 days of clean up, was doing similar work.

Like Mahan and Moore, the hired divers rip the weeds out by hand but instead of stuffing them into underwater bags and resurfacing for disposal, the divers feed them into a vacuum tube that transports them directly onto the dive boat, Lynn said. This process greatly frees up their hands and speeds up weed removal.

The weeds are then transported to the compost area of the Salem Transfer Station.

Though invasive plant species are common in most lakes and ponds throughout New Hampshire, they're spread between bodies of water by boats that aren't rinsed off when moving from one body of water to the next, Lynn said.

"What's special about our lake is we are just a group of volunteers that want to make it better," Lynn said.



TIM JEAN/Staff photo

Arlington Pond volunteers Bob Matarazzo, left, hands up a net filled with invasive weeds to Joan Borges, Pat Conway and Melody Lynn. The weeds are pulled from the bottom by divers Alan Mahan and Nancy Moore.