



NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

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New Weed Harvester Takes Maiden Voyage on Morses Pond

July 25, 2023 (Wellesley, MA) – The Town of Wellesley took advantage of good weather last week to launch the newest boat in its Morses Pond fleet, a bright orange weed harvester. The as-yet-unnamed watercraft harvests underwater weeds that clog the pond and brings them to shore for disposal. The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) and the Department of Public Works (DPW) are responsible for overall pond management.

“The harvester is like an underwater lawnmower. It cuts vegetation as the boat moves forward in the water, collects the cuttings on the barge, and takes them to shore for disposal or to use as compost,” said NRC Director Brandon Schmitt. “This machine is essential to ensuring the ongoing health of the pond and the valuable role it plays in our community.”

Morses Pond is a significant natural resource for Wellesley. The pond, beach, trails, and open space are widely used by residents and visitors for both passive and active recreation, and the area is home to a variety of wildlife.

The new harvester is 99% stainless steel with upgraded features including retractable paddle-wheels, a joystick control and an increased payload. It was purchased with \$315,000 in Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds that were appropriated by 2021 Annual Town Meeting. The Town owns two other harvesters – a smaller one with a limited payload, and a larger, older harvester that is nearing the end of its use. The new machine is expected to replace this older version.

DPW operates, maintains, and stores the harvesters, recording the number of hours used and the amount and weight of the weeds cut. This information helps track the effectiveness of the harvesting program and the overall condition of Morses Pond. Warmer winters have contributed to earlier and more aggressive weed growth in the pond.

Blue-Green Algae Growth

In addition to weed maintenance, Morses Pond and the beach area are regularly tested for contaminants. If the beach is open, swimming in that area is safe. In other parts of the pond, users should be aware of [blue-green algae \(Cyanobacteria\) blooms](#) that occur in freshwater. Swimming in areas with these blooms is not advised, and in fact, some ponds in the Commonwealth have issued [advisories for blue-green algae](#).

According to Schmitt, heavy use of lawn fertilizers and storm water runoff, especially during the current rainy summer, significantly contribute to blue-green algae growth in the pond. “Residents can help mitigate this problem by reducing or eliminating fertilizer applications and controlling storm water on their properties. The Town’s Grow Green Wellesley initiative encourages eco-friendly landscaping techniques to promote healthy lawns and habitats while protecting natural resources,” he explained. Learn more about [Grow Green Wellesley](#).

So far this summer, testing at Morses Pond shows algae levels are within normal limits and not abundant enough to be harmful to people or the environment. But since day-to-day testing is not done in the larger pond, to be safe the NRC is posting information along pond walking trails recommending that if people see visible algae blooms, they stay out of the water and keep pets from swimming or drinking this water. Additional testing will be done later in the summer and information will be updated if necessary.

Morses Pond information and advisories are available on the [Town of Wellesley website](#).

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