

Sonar[®] Aquatic Herbicide – Questions and Answers

Q. Why are you recommending a Sonar[®] treatment for our lake?

A. Once invasive exotic species, such as Eurasian watermilfoil, get sufficiently out of control, Sonar[®] represents the most reliable, effective way to get them under control. A Sonar[®] treatment can dramatically reduce the abundance of these exotic species with little impact on desirable native plants, thereby allowing native aquatic plants to grow and restoring balance and diversity to the aquatic plant community.

Q. Why are EXOTIC plants a problem?

A. Invasive exotic species, such as Eurasian watermilfoil, have come to this country without the natural population controls that keep them in check when growing in their normal range. Replacement of diverse native plant communities with a dense, monospecific community of Eurasian watermilfoil causes many problems. Excessively dense aquatic plant growth often results in a fish community of stunted panfish, as the vegetation becomes too dense for predators (such as bass) to forage effectively.

Q. Will a Sonar[®] treatment eliminate all aquatic vegetation?

A. NO! At the low rates we use, Sonar[®] is SELECTIVE (i.e., it controls some plants but not others). Typically we use selectivity to remove exotic nuisance plants (like Eurasian watermilfoil and curlyleaf pondweed) with minimal impact on most native plant species. This approach minimizes interference with recreation while leaving desirable vegetation that provides BENEFITS to the lake (see below).

Q. Can't we get rid of ALL the weeds in our lake?

A. NO. And even if you could, you shouldn't. Trying to keep a lake that has good growing conditions free of plant growth would be like trying to keep all plant life from growing in your front lawn – it just doesn't make sense! ...unless you pave it. (And if that's what you want, build a swimming pool.) Aquatic plants are an important component of the lake ecosystem. They provide many benefits, including stabilizing sediments, oxygenating the water, providing habitat for fish and invertebrates...

Q. Is Sonar[®] safe?

A. YES! Extensive testing has not identified significant human health risks associated with the proper use of this herbicides. Fluridone, the active ingredient of Sonar[®], is less toxic to animals than table salt. Sonar[®] can be applied to drinking water reservoirs, and at the rates used to selectively control Eurasian watermilfoil (20 ppb or less), it can be applied right up to the water intakes in these reservoirs. Fluridone is not a carcinogen, mutagen or reproductive toxicant. It is non-persistent in the environment (i.e. it readily breaks down) and has a low potential for bioaccumulation in the body or in food chains.

Q. We don't want to use CHEMICALS in our lake... isn't harvesting a more environmentally responsible aquatic plant control technique?

A. Not necessarily. The most environmentally responsible control technique depends on the goals of the management program and the type(s) of plants to be controlled. In some cases, harvesting is the

best choice. In other cases, harvesting can exacerbate aquatic plant problems. For example, we would not recommend harvesting a lake with an uncontrolled Eurasian watermilfoil population because harvesting will speed the spread of this aggressive exotic plant and hasten the replacement of native plants.

Q. Will our lake need any other treatments during the year Sonar® is used?

A. At least in Michigan, we will not be able to conduct any other aquatic plant treatments. It is unlikely that you will need them, as Sonar® slows the growth of native species even though it does not kill them. Algae treatments can be conducted as needed during the year of a Sonar® treatment.

Q. Aquatic plant control just addresses the SYMPTOMS of the problem—shouldn't we be addressing the CAUSES of the problem, such nutrient enrichment?

A. Yes, BUT... This statement is a confusing half-truth. There is little doubt that nutrient enrichment leads to conditions that support lots of plant growth; however, this doesn't mean that you can reverse the process and prevent rooted plant growth. Nutrient controls have been successfully used to reduce the growth of planktonic algae, but there has never been a case where nutrient controls have reduced an existing rooted plant problem. In fact, reductions in planktonic algae typically result in an INCREASE in rooted plant growth, as the water becomes clearer and plants can grow at greater depths. In addition, exotic plant species cause the greatest problems in lakes. These exotic plants are a CAUSE of many problems, and removing them is addressing one of the causes of lake problems. Nutrient controls can be an important PREVENTATIVE measure, which can help to keep the lake from developing worse problems in the future.

Q. Will we need to use Sonar® every year?

A. NO. In the years following a Sonar® treatment, it will be very important to keep close track of plant growth in the lake to identify areas where Eurasian watermilfoil has survived the treatment or become reestablished. These areas will be addressed promptly by treating them with appropriate herbicides. Usually limited "spot treatments" of small areas are sufficient to slow the reestablishment of Eurasian watermilfoil so that retreatment with Sonar® is not required for several years. Areas where native plants grow to nuisance levels will be addressed by harvesting.