



Whatcom Weeds

Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board 901 W. Smith Road Bellingham WA 98226
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AFRICAN ELODEA

Lagarosiphon major

THREAT: African elodea, also known as oxygen weed, is a native of southern Africa. Although it is not known to occur in the United States yet, its potential for invasiveness has earned it a spot on the Federal noxious weed list. African elodea has become a major aquatic weed in New Zealand, and is also a problem in parts of Europe. It forms dense stands in still or slow-moving water, blocking sunlight from the water column. This plant prefers cool water and is winter hardy. African elodea spreads by plant fragments, and the brittle stems break easily to facilitate spread. Water movement, boats and other equipment can move plant fragments. This plant is on the Washington State quarantine list, making it illegal to buy, sell or transport African elodea in this state.



DESCRIPTION: African elodea is a perennial, submersed, aquatic plant. It grows in fresh water, up to 18 feet deep where the leafy, submersed stems root in the substrate. The stems are branched and brittle, and grow up to 20 feet long. Leaves grow from the stem in a spiral pattern and crowd closer together towards the stem tip. Each leaf grows from the stem in a stiff arc, curling downwards. The leaves are about one inch long, 1/16 to 1/8 inch wide, and leaf edges are minutely toothed. Tiny pink to white female flowers grow to the surface of the water on long, thin tubes; male flowers are free-floating. Only female plants have been found outside its native range, so reproduction in these populations is by plant fragmentation only.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: As with all aquatic weeds, control of African elodea is difficult and eradication may be unrealistic. To prevent the spread of aquatic plants, all plant material should be removed from boating and recreational equipment before moving to another water body. Aquarium plants should never be disposed of in water bodies. African elodea may be controlled by mechanical or chemical means. If removing plants using mechanical means, care must be taken to remove all plant pieces from the water. Grass carp will eat this plant only if there is no other food source. Contact the weed control board if you suspect this plant is present in a location, and for site-specific recommendations.

Photo: Rohan Wells, National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research, Bugwood.org