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Lamprey control set for Lamoille River

Treatment scheduled for Sept. 30

Free Press Staff Report

State efforts to combat parasitic sea lampreys in Lake Champlain will soon focus on the Lamoille River, where pesticide treatment is scheduled to begin Wednesday, according to the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources.

A large population of lamprey larvae was recently found in the Lamoille. The treatment will be the first for the Lamoille, the only one of the lake's tributaries to receive the application this year.

Lampreys are eel-like fish that reproduce in rivers, where larvae grow to adults that swim into the lake, where they attach to fish and suck their blood.

"Sea lampreys have caused devastating impacts on fishery

restoration efforts in Lake Champlain," said Wayne Laroche, Vermont Fish and Wildlife commissioner, in a news release.

Pesticides have been used in about a dozen Vermont and New York streams feeding the lake since 2002 in an effort to improve the health of fish populations such as trout and salmon.

Under the control program, a pesticide known as TFM (3-trifluoromethyl-4-nitrophenol) "is applied in precise concentrations to the streams in a continuous, metered manner over a 12-hour period in order to kill the immature, larval form of the sea lamprey, while having little or no effects on populations of other aquatic species," the agency said.

Conservationists critical of the control program have said the

long-term effects of lampricide on nontarget species are unclear. Mollie Matteson of the Center for Biological Diversity in Richmond said criticism is likely to continue until research clarifies the impact on other species, such as spiny soft-shell turtles and freshwater mussels.

Landowners in the area have been notified. The agency recommends no domestic or recreational use downstream of the treatment site at Milton's Peterson Dam for two to three days. A similar "advisory period" of four to six days will follow at lakeside.

The agency said lamprey control has decreased wounding and scarring rates on fish, and that wounding rates for lake trout and landlocked salmon in 2008 were the lowest in 10 years.