



NEWS PHOTO / CHARLES V. TINES

Weed harvesters Eric Gleisner and Roger Cantelon do their thing with their thing on an Oakland lake.

For fun and profit

Weed 'eaters' cleaning up

By DON TSCHIRHART
News Staff Writer

Roger Cantelon and Eric Gleisner like to mow weeds. And like many other single men in their 20's, they also like to be at the lake on warm summer days.

The two Bloomfield Township men have found a way to do both — and earn some money on the side.

The pair own a company which specializes in mowing unsightly weeds which grow in the hundreds of lakes located in Oakland County. Using two harvesters they own, Cantelon and Gleisner plan to spend 15 hours a day, seven days a week cutting weeds in various lakes this summer.

While their company is the only one of its kind in Oakland County, the weed cutting procedure has become so successful that several lakefront homeowner associations have purchased their own harvesters.

But the two young men aren't worried. There are 450 registered lakes in Oakland County.

LAST YEAR — the first year of operation — they mowed 400 acres of weeds. They charge \$100 an hour for this service. They mow one acre every hour.

Their company, Inland Lakes Weed Harvesting Co., was formed two years ago, following the demise of a five-year-long Oakland County sponsored experimental weed cutting program on all lakes.

The pair purchased the county's harvester for \$21,000. Since then,

their business has grown by leaps and bounds.

The aquatic weed harvesters are barges powered by diesel engines. They move through the water at 3 miles an hour.

Large steel-cutting outdoor scythes cut a four to eight-foot swath through the weeds. The scissors can cut down to five foot depths.

Cantelon, 24, said his company has contracts with two dozen lakes this summer.

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THE BIGGEST problem the firm faces, Cantelon said, is convincing lakefront owners to contribute toward harvesting.

"It's hard for associations to raise money," he said. "Some people will buy an expensive lakefront home, but won't spend a nickel to improve the lake."

The funding roadblock, he said, may be overcome or using a new state law which permits formation of a riparian lake board that can assess for lake improvements.

But Cantelon admitted that just harvesting the weeds won't provide a long term solution to a lake's weed problem.

"People have got to control storm drains that flow into their lake, fertilizer runoff and new residential developments," he said. "If this is

done, lakefront owners will have a clean lake."

DAVID BRADBURY, an environmental consultant to the Oakland Drain Commission which is responsible for the county's experimental weed cutting program, said there was "real and measurable improvements in water quality" on the lakes after the county harvested aquatic weeds.

He said it was discovered that chemicals used in the past to kill weeds harmed the lakes' ecology. He said that dredging the weeds and muck away proved too expensive.

Cantelon said that competition in the Oakland County aquatic weed harvesting business is not much of a factor at this time, but is expected to increase as interest in the new method grows. A company in Ewart — 150 miles northwest of Oakland County — has been chosen by residents on Pine Lake to cut weeds this year.

And some lakeside homeowners are finding it cheaper to buy harvesters themselves.

Several years ago, the Watkins Lake Homeowners Association established a special tax on lakefront property owners to raise funds to purchase a harvester and dump truck. The equipment cost \$65,000.

Maritima Lake Association collected \$300 from each lakefront owner to purchase a harvester which individual property owners operate.

Other lakefront owners groups also are studying whether they should purchase their own machines.