

**COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS
DIVISION OF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW APPEALS**

**IN THE MATTER OF
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION
Docket No. DEP-04-919
DEP FILE #233-547
NATICK**

TESTIMONY OF DEBORAH RIDINGS

I, Deborah Ridings, do hereby swear and affirm the following:

1. Since 2000, I have resided at 13 Crescent Street in Natick, Massachusetts. My home abuts the western shore of South Pond, which is part of Lake Cochituate. I am one of the Petitioners in this matter.

2. I am a 1981 graduate of Seton Hall University in New Jersey, with a B.A. in communications and a career in telecommunications engineering. I presently work as a Boat Captain on Boston Harbor.

3. Prior to living on the Lake, I was a visitor to Lake Cochituate for twelve years. One of the reasons I moved to Natick was my use and enjoyment of the Lake.

4. Among the values I derive from the Lake are the water I use in my home for drinking and other purposes. I also make extensive recreational use of the Lake through motor boating, kayaking, canoeing, swimming, fishing, water skiing, sailing and, in the winter, ice skating. I also enjoy viewing the wildlife that live in, on, and around the Lake, which include blue heron, hawks, geese, ducks, and even a bald eagle sighting. plus, many other birds; as well as muskrats; raccoons; red fox; deer; frogs; clams; snails; and many species of fish, including large and small mouth bass, perch, pickerel, and blue gill. A photograph of the Lake, as seen from the shoreline of my home, is attached hereto.

5. My family, friends, and neighbors often visit my home and use the Lake. These include children, ranging in age from three months to teenagers. I have regularly observed their recreational uses of the Lake, as well as the uses of others on the Lake.

6. I first noticed the growth of the milfoil weed (referred to herein as the "weed" or "weeds") in the Lake, off the shore of my home, about three years ago. For the past three years, I have closely observed and monitored the growth patterns of the weed along the shore of South Pond. About two years ago, I joined the Lake Cochituate "Weed

Watchers.” I have participated in the Weed Watchers’ training program regarding how to prevent the spread of invasive weeds in the Lake, helped distribute pamphlets to Natick residents providing information about invasive weeds and how to prevent their spread, and I engage in weed pulling in the Lake to help keep the weeds under control.

7. The weeds first become apparent in the Lake as the air temperature warms in the Spring, about mid-May. Along the western side of South Pond, which tends to be shallow, the weeds grow in a band roughly paralleling and close to the shoreline, to about fifty to eighty feet off-shore, in water approximately 4.5 to 10 feet deep. There are also other forms of Lake vegetation that grow in this same area. As one moves beyond about eighty feet off the shoreline at my property, the depth of the Lake appears to prevent weed growth. I have personally measured up to seventy foot depths in South Pond.

8. The weed tops sit at the surface of the water. Motor boats pass through the band of weeds, chopping the weeds at the top. Weed fragments then wash in toward shore and, unless removed, start to sprout. It appears to me that this is a contributing factor to how the weeds spread in the Lake.

9. The weeds are densest in June to September. They start to decline as the water temperature falls, and substantially recede by late October.

10. The effect of the weeds on recreational use of the Lake appears to be minimal. The State has blocked passages between the ponds that comprise the Lake, in an effort to prevent boaters from spreading the weeds to and between the ponds. The State has also allowed boating on North Pond. This has reduced boat traffic somewhat in South Pond, but has not appeared to reduce overall use of the Lake for boating. I, my family, friends, and neighbors, continue to use the Lake for all the recreational uses that we always have.

11. Even in Pegan Cove of South Pond, where the weeds are most densely concentrated, there has not been any observable decline in recreational use. Water skiers still establish their slalom course in Pegan Cove, despite the fact that such activities likely result in weed fragmentation and, therefore, weed propagation. To the best of my knowledge, the State has not attempted to control such activities to prevent the spread of the weeds.

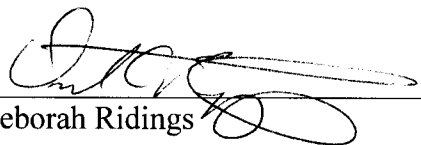
12. I am challenging the State’s proposal to use herbicides to control the weeds for several reasons. First, I am concerned about the possibility that the herbicides will migrate from the Lake and pollute the Natick public wells that draw on Lake water. Second, I am concerned that people using the Lake will be exposed to the residual herbicides through contact with the surface water and sediment. In particular, I have observed small children who largely remain in the Lake shallows, and who commonly ingest water and Lake sediment while playing. Third, I am concerned that the wildlife living in, on, and around the Lake will be exposed to the herbicides, both during and after application.

13. Some or all of these same kinds of concerns have prompted difficult and expensive efforts to assess the impact of pollutants discharged to the Lake from the U.S. Natick Army Lab and other point and non-point sources; efforts to control or halt such pollution; and efforts to clean it up. It does not make sense to me to intentionally introduce yet more hazardous chemicals for the purpose of controlling weeds in this lake that is part of the Natick drinking water supply.

14. As a result of my concerns, I have investigated possible alternative non-chemical methods to prevent the spread of the weeds. Alternative control methods include the use of benthic matting, hand pulling, draw down and mechanical harvesting. Because a significant cause of weed propagation appears to be fragmentation at or near the surface as a result of contact with boats, I believe one viable, non-chemical weed-control alternative that should be attempted is controlled lake mowing with weed collection. As the weeds are cut, the weed fragments can be removed from the Lake , to prevent propagation. If the weeds are cut at least four feet below the surface most if not all boats and other recreational users of the Lake would thereby be prevented from coming into contact with, and spreading, the weeds. Based on my experience as a Weed Watcher, weekly mowing would effectively control weed height.

15. Other non-chemical alternatives also exist, and should be attempted, to control the weeds, before resorting to application of herbicides or pesticides which, once done, cannot be undone.

Signed under the pains and penalties of perjury this 2 day of May, 2005.


Deborah Ridings

