



With no sign of Giant Salvinia, PRVWSD to reopen all of Pelahatchie Bay to boating Dec. 1

Having achieved a goal of going a full year without any evidence of the invasive vegetation Giant Salvinia, the Pearl River Valley Water Supply District's Board of Directors approved a plan Thursday to reopen all areas of Pelahatchie Bay to boating and fishing on Dec. 1.

PRVWSD workers will immediately begin removing all barriers (boom) and signs from the impacted area of the north shore in the Bay but will leave in place the barriers at the bridge on the North Shore Causeway.

Parks and Recreation Committee Chairman Kenny Latham said his committee made the recommendation based on its meeting Monday with Giant Salvinia Task Group partners from the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks, Mississippi State University, and other aquatic vegetation specialists. He said the task group's decision to reopen was unanimous.

"As we always have from the start, we are following the recommendation of our partners," Latham said. "We have relied on their expertise from Day 1, and they have done an exceptional job. It was always a goal to get through one full growing season without any signs of Giant Salvinia so we could reopen the Bay and we have done that."

Outgoing Board President Jennifer Hall echoed Latham's praise for the partners.

"Nobody believed we could successfully eradicate the Giant Salvinia, but it appears that we have done just that and it's a credit to the job our partners did," said Hall, who led the Board during the battle. "As I understand it, Barnett Reservoir is the first major public body of water to achieve eradication."

According to Gray Turnage of Mississippi State University, one of the Task Group partners, "only two lakes in the United States hit with Giant Salvinia have been able to totally eradicate it. One was a small private lake in South Carolina where Giant Salvinia was first found in the wild in the United States in the mid 90s, when the federal and state governments went in and drained

the lake. The other is right out there — Barnett Reservoir. “If we can make it through another full growing season without any new discoveries, then I think we can claim total eradication.”

It was biologist Ryan Jones of the MDWFP who delivered the good news at Monday’s Parks/Recreation committee meeting.

“We have conducted several surveys this year, especially during the peak summer growing season, in the entire north shore area of Pelahatchie Bay,” he said. “We did an extensive crisscross grid survey of the area from boats — and in boots in the mud and water — in September and did not find a single sign of *Salvinia*.”

“We have all been in agreement from Day 1 that we needed to go through an entire growing season without any evidence of *Salvinia* before we’d feel secure in reopening all of the Bay to fishing and boating. We are at that point now.”

Giant *Salvinia* is a non-native, highly invasive tropical plant that in the right conditions — hot and humid — can double its biomass in a matter of days. It was identified in a small area of Pelahatchie Bay in late spring of 2018, and later that year it had spread to several areas of the Bay’s mostly undeveloped north shore. Acting on the advice of the MDWFP and MSU, the Board issued an emergency proclamation and formed the task group.

The first move was an unprecedented complete six-month closure of the Bay to boating, and a year-long boat traffic block under the bridge on North Shore Causeway that connects the Bay to the Main Lake. Other tools used by the team were lower lake levels, herbicide application both by boat and helicopter, and even a flame thrower. A much-needed assist from Mother Nature came earlier this year with a deep freeze in February that iced-over the entire Giant *Salvinia* Management Area. Native to the tropical region of Brazil and northern Argentina, Giant *Salvinia* cannot tolerate freezing temperatures.

The Board agreed with the partners’ recommendation that other parts of the original declaration remain in place, including continued surveillance of the area, educating the public about “Clean! Drain! Dry!” program, maintaining its requirements for tournament organizers and participants, and keeping the floating boom in place at the bridge.

“I’d feel better about that layer of protection at the bridge, acting as a block of not only Giant *Salvinia*, should it reappear, but also the many other forms of invasive vegetation in the Bay to prevent it reaching the main lake,” Turnage said.

Board members also felt the barriers at the bridge added a layer of boating safety since it requires slower “now-wake” speeds to negotiate the turns around the hard booms.