

Water Hyacinth in Florida

Then and Now



"WATER HYACINTHS AREN'T SOMETHING WE HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THESE DAYS,"

said the fisherman on the St. Johns River.

"Used to be, there were so many plants, I couldn't get my boat into the water; but today there's not a problem."

Therein lies a misperception.

The fisherman is partly correct: he *is* able to get his boat into the river now, because there are relatively few water hyacinth plants there. But this is only because 100 years of hyacinth seek-and-destroy missions have succeeded in greatly reducing the plant's numbers, and

keeping them low. So to many people, especially people new to Florida, the relatively few water hyacinths out there don't appear to be a threat at all.

However, were it not for at least \$70 million worth of management efforts *every year* in Florida (not including private expenditures), we know that our lakes, rivers, canals and wetlands would again be quickly covered with any number of non-native invasive aquatic plants.

In fact, this \$70 million protects *billions* in Florida's natural and economic assets. Today there are a number of significant non-native aquatic plants on the loose in Florida's waters and wetlands. Some, like hydrilla, water hyacinth, melaleuca and torpedo grass are well-known and costly invaders. Others, like wild taro, water spinach, West Indian marsh grass, and wetland nightshade are finally being recognized as the serious threats that they are. Still others, like Wright's nutrush, water snowflake, Asian marsh weed and giant reed may be making advances without us even knowing it.

For more information on the subject, visit: <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/guide/intrguid.html>

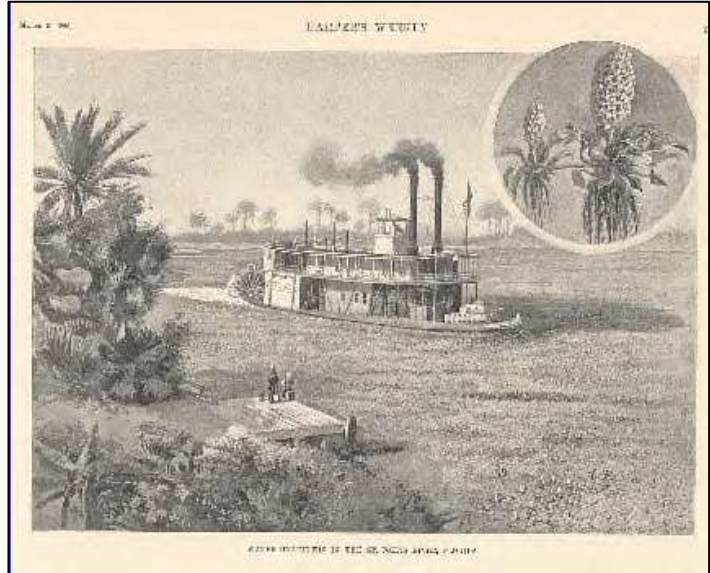


Illustration of water hyacinth infesting Florida's St. Johns River, published in an 1898 issue of *Harper's Weekly* magazine. The author of the accompanying article said, "I have seen vessels going at full speed brought to a complete standstill."

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Name: _____ Class Period: _____ Date: _____

Directions: Answer the following questions using information from the passage above.

1. Are water hyacinths currently a problem in Florida?

2. How does the removal of water hyacinth affect Florida's current economy?

3. How do you think the water hyacinth affected Florida's economy 100 years ago?

4. What do you think "management effort" means?

5. Aside from navigation problems, what other types of problems could occur from plant infestations?

