



Whatcom Weeds

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SWOLLEN BLADDERWORT

Utricularia inflata

THREAT: Swollen bladderwort is a native of eastern North America that has been introduced into several locations in Washington State. It grows in still or slow-moving water and can become invasive, forming dense mats of floating plants. These mats can impact native plants and animals, water quality, and, recreational use of the water body. Swollen bladderwort spreads through seeds, plant fragments, turions (winter buds) and tubers. It can be moved by water movement, boats, recreational equipment and, possibly, waterfowl. Swollen bladderwort is on the Washington State Weed Control Board's monitor list and on the state quarantine list. It is illegal to buy, sell or transport swollen bladderwort in the state of Washington.

DESCRIPTION: Swollen bladderwort is a submersed, aquatic, carnivorous plant. It grows up to 6 feet long and is either free-floating or attached loosely to the substrate by root-like structures. The stems branch into highly divided leaf-like segments, often giving the plant a bushy appearance. Like other bladderworts, this plant has seed-like bladders, used to trap invertebrates, from which the plant gains nutrients. Trap doors on the bladders are triggered by the invertebrate, which is sucked inside and digested by enzymes. Swollen bladderwort has yellow, snapdragon-like flowers that are borne in clusters of 3 to 14 on upright stalks. The flower stalk is supported by a distinctive spoke-like whorl of 4 to 10 wedge-shaped floating leaves, up to 3 ½ inches long. In Washington, swollen bladderwort flowers from June to July. When not flowering, swollen bladderwort is very difficult to distinguish from the native bladderworts.



MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: As with all aquatic weeds, control of swollen bladderwort is difficult and eradication may be unrealistic. To prevent the spread of aquatic plants, all plant material should be removed from boating and recreational equipment before moving to another water body. Aquarium and water garden plants should never be disposed of into water bodies. Swollen bladderwort may be controlled by mechanical or chemical means. If removing plants using mechanical means, care must be taken to remove all plant pieces from the water. Grass carp will eat swollen bladderwort but it is not their preferred food. Contact the weed control board for site-specific chemical recommendations.

Above Photograph by Clayton Antieau