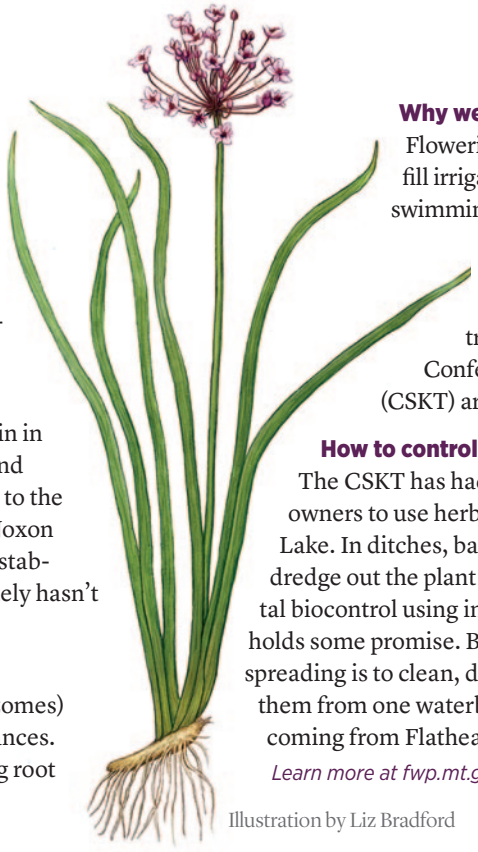
Flowering rush

Butomus umbellatus



What it is

Flowering rush is an aquatic plant that, at a glance, resembles any of several native sedges and bulrushes (grasslike plants) found in shallow-water areas. The name is misleading, because the type in Montana rarely shows its pink flowers, making it hard to identify.

Where it's found

Flowering rush was introduced to the Flathead Basin in the mid-1960s as an ornamental. It later escaped and spread, the plants drifting down the Flathead River to the Clark Fork River and then farther downstream to Noxon and Cabinet Gorge reservoirs. The species is now established throughout these water systems but fortunately hasn't spread to others.

How it spreads

This aggressive species spreads when its roots (rhizomes) are fragmented by boat propellers or other disturbances. Each rhizome piece can drift for miles before taking root and propagating.

Why we hate it

Flowering rush grows in thick mats that fill irrigation ditches and clog boating and swimming areas on lakes and reservoirs. It also creates ideal habitat for northern pike, which proliferate and gobble up young westslope cutthroat and bull trout, native species that FWP and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) are trying to recover on Flathead Lake.

How to control it

The CSKT has had some success working with homeowners to use herbicides on the south shore of Flathead Lake. In ditches, backhoes sometimes are required to dredge out the plant and keep water flowing. Experimental biocontrol using insects from Europe to eat the plant holds some promise. But the best way to keep the plant from spreading is to clean, drain, and dry boats before moving them from one waterbody to another, especially when coming from Flathead Lake and the Clark Fork system.

Learn more at fwp.mt.gov/conservation/aquatic-invasive-species.

Illustration by Liz Bradford

"Year class"

A quick look at a concept or term commonly used in fisheries, wildlife, or state parks management.

A "year class" (or "cohort') is a specific generation of fish, born in a particular year. For any fishery, FWP biologists may discuss different year classes of different species—for example, on the Bighorn, the 2019 rainbow trout cohort or the 2017 brown trout year class.

Some year classes are stronger (more individuals than average) or weaker (fewer individuals than average) than others, usually based on the spawning conditions of that particular year. For instance, in spring of 2011, heavy winter snowpack created high water and, thus, abundant shoreline vegetation habitat and abundant nutrients in Holter Reservoir. That combination produced a record yellow perch year class. As biologists who conducted test netting each subsequent year watched perch from that super-abundant year class grow larger, they predicted extraordinary angling for 2014–18, when those fish would reach catchable sizes of 8 to 13 inches. That's exactly what happened.

A similar term, "age class," refers to a generation of fish that have lived a certain number of years. For instance, on Canyon Ferry Reservoir, biologists may talk about "age 1" walleye or "age 5" walleye and the relative abundance and average size of those fish when discussing management strategies.

Wildlife biologists also use age class when talking about the age structure of deer and elk herds. For instance, due to a severe winter three years ago, a herd may now have very few age 3 deer, because so many fawns died that winter. When biologists talk about "older age class" deer and elk, they are generally referring to a few consecutive year classes of males that have lived long enough to grow larger antlers. ■

The 2011 perch year class on Holter produced great ice fishing for four years.

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