Giant salvinia piles up against a water-control structure in a drainage canal one mile north of the Town of Cameron, Cameron Parish Drainage Board member Scott Henry, left, leaves the site with a parish employee after surveying the surprising find of giant salvinia in the area. State wildlife officials are hurrying crews to the area to control the spread of the non-native plant, which grows rapidly and clogs valuable freshwater fish and waterfowl habitat.

**Scourge of Salvinia**

Brazilian plant threatens waterways

By JOE MACALUSO

After surviving the first invasion of giant salvinia into Louisiana, state wildlife and LSU Ag Center personnel are marshaling forces to combat the spread of the noxious plant in the Cameron Parish marshes.

Warnings of biologists from state agencies came two days before thousands of West Zone duck hunters take to the southwestern area marshes.

Discovering giant salvinia — Salvinia molesta — in a canal one mile north of the town of Cameron is the first sighting since 1998 when it was found in Toledo Bend and an isolated area of Bayou Tech near New Iberia.

"It's the first location outside Toledo Bend that it's so well established," LSU Ag Center Cooperative Extension director Paul Coreil said Wednesday.

Coreil, field agent Kevin Savoie and Department of Wildlife and Fisheries biologists are urging duck hunters, fishermen and boaters who take to Cameron Parish waterways this weekend and in the near future to clean any plants and all plant parts from their boats, outboards and trailers before leaving the landing.

Coreil said its believed that boats used in infested areas of Toledo Bend, and possibly waterways in other states, are to blame for the infestation of the canal near Cameron.

"We need boaters, duck hunters and fishermen to do clean their boats and trailers to help stop the spread of this plant," Coreil said with a note of urgency in his voice. "The site where it was found is north of the Cameron Courthouse and between the Ship Channel and Town of Cameron," he said. "It is very close to the 'Big Burn' and the Cameron-Creole watershed, two important fishing and waterfowl places.

Giant salvinia is the larger cousin of another imported plant, common salvinia, which has proliferated in state waters for more than two decades. Both plants were imported from Brazil for use in water gardens.

"Most fishermen and duck hunters know the problem with common salvinia. It covers lots of waterways," Coreil said. "This (giant salvinia) is more dangerous, a much more serious threat to Louisiana waters because it grows faster and mats up faster."

The Wildlife and Fisheries Department confirmed Wednesday that field crews were dispatched to the area. The LDWF Aquatic Plant Control Section uses the herbicide "Reward" to control giant salvinia.

Savoie said the problem with the chemical is its high cost per application.

"We know giant salvinia cannot tolerate salinity, and we have discussed the possibility of using a slug of saltwater to knock it out," Coreil said. "But, we have concerns about the impact on bass fishing."

Savoie said giant salvinia is more damaging than common salvinia to the environment and to outboard engines. Giant salvinia can damage the exterior of an outboard and clog water intakes. He said more significant damage comes to waterbodies.

Biologists explained giant salvinia grows rapidly and can mat in a thick layer over a water surface. The end result is the smothering of native vegetation, which can deal a death blow to the area as waterfowl habitat.

The further decomposition of native plants removes vital dissolved oxygen from the water and causes fish kills.

Savoie also said mats of giant salvinia could clog drainage canals thereby causing widespread flooding damage.

Coreil said the LSU Ag Center is concerned that further infestation could "have devastating effects on rice production by clogging canals used as surface water irrigation sources," and adversely impact crawfish and catfish production.