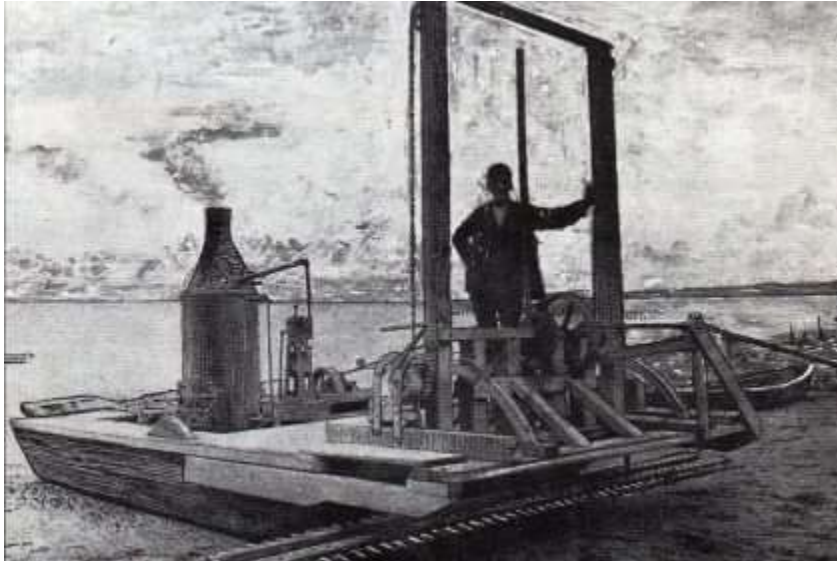


# The History of Aquatic Weed Harvesters and Their Role in Waterway Management



Little thought is given to aquatic weeds unless you live or recreate on the world's waterways. The aquatic plant harvester industry has grown in response to those concerns.

With Pictures of steam powered cutter boats dating back to the late 1890's, we know that excessive plant growth has been a problem for a long time. At first, the problem was dealt with manually. People came up with clever tools to help make weed cutting easier. Others tried hand pulling the plants, but the going was slow.



The true origins of the harvesting industry began with a weed cutter boat built by the **Hockney Company in Silver Lake, Wisconsin**, in 1903. It is interesting to note that this machine was not originally built to meet recreational purposes; it was made in response to fussy Chicago housewives! Around the turn of the century, ice was harvested from Wisconsin lakes destined for Chicago iceboxes. The housewives there didn't like cleaning out the weeds when the ice melted. **Hockney** designed this small boat, which featured a reciprocating cutter bar and duck-

feet-like paddles for propulsion, to cut down the weeds in the fall so that clean ice could be harvested in the winter.



From this modest beginning many attempts were made to modify and improve these early cutter boats.

Mechanical harvesters offer an environmentally sound method of controlling nuisance vegetation. As these weeds are removed from the lake, the water is immediately ready for use and there are no restrictions on use of the area that might be experienced with herbicide or some biological control treatments.

Removal of this biomass prevents its eventual decay and settling to the bottom, helping to reduce sedimentation in the lake. There is some nutrient removal with harvesting too, as the nitrogen and phosphorous that is bound up in the plant exits the water body. Harvesting is usually not lethal, leaving behind an oxygen and habitat producing plant, which is often desirable.