

FISH

FROM A1

appears unrelated to the herbicide.

Al Niebur, senior fisheries biologist for the state, said he counted 341 dead fish in a partial informal survey last weekend. Niebur said all indications point to an outbreak of bacterial infections that are commonplace on Wisconsin waterways in late May or early June.

Similar outbreaks on Shawano Lake have claimed as many as 1,000 fish at a time in recent

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RYAN HOFFMANN,
conservation director for
Wisconsin Bass Nation

years, Niebur said.

"It's not unusual to get these kills out there," he said. "In some ways, it's natural."

The herbicide applications carried out by private contractors were approved by the state to eliminate invasive plant species that were a threat to water quality

on the lake. The operation was funded with a \$200,000 state grant and another \$200,000 collected by Shawano Area Waterways Management, a private group that includes lakefront property owners.

Gary DeFere, president of the waterways group, said fish mortality occurs naturally on the lake and has nothing to do with the new herbicide program supported by his group.

"We've done it very, very carefully," DeFere said. "Everything has been done properly."

Boats equipped with

long hoses applied the herbicide by releasing the chemical deep underwater to kill unwanted plants growing down below. The treatments targeted weed-infested areas covering a total of 928 acres in numerous sectors of the lake.

Officials said the herbicide, known as DMA 4, was applied in concentrations far below any level that would represent a health risk to fish or other wildlife.

Hoffmann said his group is concerned that the widespread herbicide usage killed off large areas of plant life so quickly

that it depleted oxygen levels in the water, causing the fish kill. The group has urged its members to avoid fishing the lake, to avoid putting any added stress on fish populations there.

"It's a resource that we should all protect, that we should all want to protect," he said. "We want to know what happened, so it doesn't happen again."

The DNR said it has never documented a fish kill caused by the sort of herbicide treatment carried out on Shawano Lake.

Others associated

with the herbicide program agree that it likely has not harmed any fish.

Eddie Heath, an ecologist with Onterra LLC, consultants on the project, said closely monitored oxygen levels in the water have not dropped significantly since the invasive plants began to wither. Heath said he visited the lake Friday and saw no evidence of a fish kill.

Officials are still tracking the herbicide program's effects, Heath added, although it seems to have been a success.

"Everything has gone exactly to plan," he said.