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Company shows off floating plant islands that can clean ponds

By Paul Jankowski
Posted 11 hours ago

The idea for their company came when Josh Clark and Fred Manning were contracted to monitor the fishway in Thornbury.

On the job, the two former Ministry of Natural Resources employees "had lots of spare time to talk about different ideas and this was sort of an idea we shared and we decided to run with it," Clark said in an interview at the Home and Cottage Expo, held over the weekend at the Harry Lumley Bayshore Community Centre.

So they started C&M Aquatic Management Group in 2006, initially to help people stock fish in ponds — not koi in backyards but native species for people on larger acreages — and it has progressed from there, he said,

"When I was a fisheries biologist I actually got a fair number of calls, people calling up trying to figure out where to get mostly trout for their ponds . . . nine out of 10 ponds are not suitable for trout and the idea was always there it might be good to offer that kind of service . . . there's not that many companies out there that specialize in fish," Clark said.

"Initially we were just stocking fish. We were going out to look at the ponds before we stocked the fish we were noticing most people had the same issues — algae problems, weed problems, odour issues, water clarity — and that's where it started to expand to more consulting services . . . and that's kind of when we started to learn about floating island technology."



Josh Clark, an aquatic biologist with the company C&M Aquatic Management Group of Owen Sound, holds up one of the company's floating treatment wetland frames Saturday April

"It was one of the things we identified as an option to create fish habitat, because a lot of the ponds we go to see, they're just dug ponds. They just basically have straight sides to them and there's no real habitat there for the fish. So floating islands are something I found out about from the web as an option to create fish habitat and just as I read more and more about it, the nutrient uptake function of it and just the number of people who were contacting us with those types of issues, we expanded our business."

Manning, Clark and Steve Holler, who has since joined the partnership, were all manning the company's display at the home expo, garnering interest in their floating islands, which are created by clamping together plastic frames and putting a planting medium on top. Different plants — depending on what needs to be done to clean up the pond or create a habitat — are added. The whole thing then is set free to, for example, have the hydroponic growing system remove phosphorous from the water.

The company is based in Owen Sound but there's a rising interest in Western Canada, Alberta in particular, in floating islands, Clark said. C&M already has a pilot project near Fort McMurray in a rejuvenated oils sands tailing pond and proposals in front of both Calgary and Edmonton for storm water management.

On Clark's to-do list is writing up a proposal to treat salinity in active oil sands tailing ponds, something he said is a major problem. He foresees floating islands covered with plants that will take up the salts and, when their efficiency starts to lag, removing them, trucking them away for disposal and planting anew.

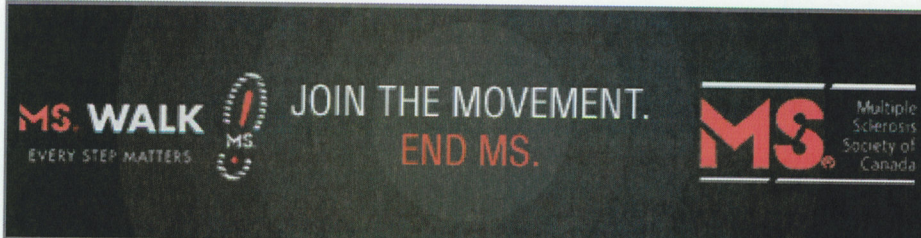
Clark, who has a masters degree from the University of Guelph, said he has "good connections in academia, so what we've been doing both with islands and this Blue Frog system (for use in large waste water lagoons) is try to coordinate some research . . . If we know we can tie up X grams of phosphorous per square foot, then we know how much to put in . . . where to use it, what species of plants to use, those types of things. We're involved in a number of projects with Queen's University, Fleming College, Trent University," he said.

"Whether your managing somebody's back yard pond or a municipal lagoon, it's the same issue. It's still a natural system, it's just the wastewater lagoon has a lot more nutrients in it," Clark said.



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