***Chara/Nitella* Growth in Piedmont Lakes**

*Chara/Nitella* algae are annual native plants that are closely related and look very similar.  They superficially look like rooted aquatic plants but are actually algae.

They return annually because of special reproductive structures, although, they may only intermittently produce large populations in any portion of a lake. The many species that make up this group of plants are some of the most common submerged shallow water plant species in Piedmont water bodies this time of year including all Duke Energy lakes.  *Chara/Nitella* have a growing season starting in early summer and continuing into late August or early fall.  The algal plants are attached by a holdfast structure in the bottom sediments and is not usually free floating unless it has become dislodged from the bottom due to high water flow, windborne wave action, boat activity, and wading and swimming.

The plants normally grows 2 - 6 ft. deep, however, they can grow deeper depending on water charity. It is not unusual for some species of this plant group to give off a slight garlic odor when pulled up and crushed. Thus the common name “skunk or garlic weed.”

These algae will naturally die off during the late summer to early fall as water temperatures drop. When the *Chara/Nitella* algae dies naturally in the fall it will usually disintegrate in place, laying down on the bottom to decompose.  Decomposition time from a few days to two weeks is dependent upon water temperature. Warmer water temperatures quicken decomposition.

These plants are important fish and wildlife habitat in lakes. Small invertebrates that provide food to small juvenile fish live and reproduce in the plants beds. The beds also provide cover for these small fish from larger fish predation.

Natural resource state agencies in the Carolinas have requested that native aquatic plant species not be controlled due to their many beneficial aspects for the survival and proliferation of fish and wildlife. Those interested in these plants may wish to search for more information and photos using their computer browser entering the words *Chara* and *Nitella*.