

Summary of Public Comments, Responses, and Plan Modifications to the Draft 2004 Aquatic Plant Management Plan

Commenters: John A. Ball III, Ben Baroody, Tripp Bradley, Ben Bethea, Culver Choate, Bennett Griffin, Robin Inabinet, Robert E. Keener (Lake Murray Association), H. Moore, W. J. Lyday Jr., John Michael Otis Jr., Rick Reames III, George Selkinghaus, Patrick Stowe.

Lake Murray:

Comments:

We support the plan as written. (Keener)

Why not more carp, why are we going to wait another summer for something positive to happen? (Selkinghaus)

I disagree with the use of grass carp in Lake Murray. Let the history of Santee Cooper teach us a lesson. (Lyday)

Response:

64,500 triploid grass carp (15 fish per vegetated acre) were stocked in Lake Murray in 2003 to control the growth of hydrilla. The management strategy is to control some of the hydrilla by the drawdown (for construction of the new dam) and control the remaining hydrilla (4300 ac) that is still in the water below 345-foot contour with grass carp. Stocking while the lake is down minimizes the number of grass carp initially needed to control the hydrilla and should provide enough fish to keep it controlled when the lake returns to its normal level.

This year's plan is consistent with the 2003 plan. The 2004 plan call for no stocking of grass carp on Lake Murray unless hydrilla coverage **exceeds 4300 acres above the 330-foot contour at which time the Aquatic Plant Management Council may reconsider the need for additional grass carp.**

Based on our experience on other lakes, we anticipate that it will take about three years for the grass carp to achieve measurable control of the hydrilla. But once that is achieved, control will last for years. Water users need to be patient while the grass carp grow and feed on the plants.

Plan Modifications:

None at present.

Santee Cooper Lakes:

Comments:

Santee Cooper is a desert; too many carp caused it. Don't release any more carp. (Inabinet)

Don't eradicate plants above I-95 Bridge this will likely result in lower numbers of ducks. (Bethea)

Hydrilla is an attribute and eliminating it is a severe destruction of waterfowl habitat. (Moore, Ball)

Oppose the use of grass carp in the Santee Cooper lakes. (Bradley, Reames)

Response:

The language in the draft plan is consistent with the comments not to stock more grass carp in the Santee Cooper Lakes. No additional grass carp are planned for 2004, but the Council may reconsider the need for additional fish if hydrilla regrowth and regrowth potential warrants it.

The long-term management strategy for hydrilla control in the Santee Cooper Lakes is to maintain a sufficient number of grass carp in the system to keep hydrilla suppressed while allowing desirable native vegetation to flourish. The DNR and Santee Cooper recognize that although the grass carp have been effective in controlling hydrilla they have also controlled many desirable submersed aquatic plant species. In response to this concern, the agencies have signed an agreement that identifies management goals and objectives that try to maintain 10% of the lakes' surface area as beneficial vegetated habitat for fish, waterfowl and other aquatic organisms. The Aquatic Plant Management Council has adopted the management agreement as part of the long-term management strategy for the Santee Cooper Lakes and has included it in the final 2004 Aquatic Plant Management Plan. An important part of the agreement between the agencies is accurate and timely monitoring of aquatic vegetation. The agencies will work together in developing a monitoring work plan. Decisions regarding subsequent stocking of grass carp will be determined by the Council following assessment of monitoring results by DNR, Santee Cooper, and other agency representatives on the Council.

Plan Modifications:

None at present.

General:**Comments:**

The irresponsible use of grass carp in this state causes the destruction of waterfowl habitat. (Otis, Stowe)

Waterfowl numbers are decreasing due to the use of grass carp to control aquatic vegetation. (Baroody, Griffin, Ball, Choate)

AVM should be taken into account in management decisions but study the possibility of using hydrilla in selected areas. (Ball)

Response:

Submersed and emergent vegetation provides important habitat for waterfowl and fish as well as other types of wildlife. Management plans in public waters always attempt to control invasive species while trying to maintain desirable vegetation. Grass carp are used only after other more selective control methods have proven ineffective and after ample discussion in public meetings and plan reviews. Except for one small state park lake, no grass carp are planned for any state waterways in 2004.

The DNR is very concerned about waterfowl and bald eagle deaths due to AVM. AVM is already a major problem in some areas of South Carolina and the DNR is actively participating in research by major universities to identify the specific cause. Studies to date clearly indicate that the consumption of hydrilla in certain lakes by waterfowl and coots leads to AVM. It appears that a specific alga that grows on the hydrilla emits a toxin that causes the neurological disease in birds. When these sick birds are eaten by bald eagles, they also contract the disease. On going studies will hopefully confirm the specific cause of the disease. Because hydrilla appears to be involved in birds contracting AVM and because it is illegal to distribute and plant hydrilla in South Carolina waters, it cannot be used as waterfowl habitat.

Plan Modifications:

None at present.