

Summary of Public Comments, Responses, and Plan Modifications to the Draft 2005 South Carolina Aquatic Plant Management Plan

Commenters: Lee Bacot, Teresa Cannon, Jeremiah Jensen, Alan Rae, David Rogers, Randy Saliga, Michael Sizer, Joseph M. Walker, Mark West, Jesse N. Williams III, Jon & Judy Willkomm, Sharpep2

Lake Murray:

Comments:

I support the management plan at the level APMC has recommended for 2005. (Saliga)

I'd voice my opinion against the use of more grass carp... I have no problem with the spot treatment of access points and intakes, but I'm worried that the use of more carp could result in a situation similar to Santee where the grass was totally exterminated. (Jensen)

Why can't we just come to an agreement on the hydrilla (Lake Murray) like they did on Lake Guntersville, AL? (Rae)

Replacing vegetation removed by carp with artificial habitat would be a great compromise for fishermen. (Rogers)

The reason the fishing is good is because of the grass! Take a note from Va. And Maryland they treat it as a natural resource up there, they even have signs at the landings asking people to protect it! (Walker)

Introducing the grass carp to Lake Murray is killing the grass off too fast, before long there is going to be no grass left, Murray is a recreational lake and fishing is going to suffer. (West)

The idea of releasing large numbers of grass carp is frightening. (Williams)

I'm afraid to purchase a pontoon because of the weeds. (Cannon)

Primrose is blocking access and navigation for many residents. (Sizer)

We are very concerned about water primrose and hope that serious steps are being taken. (Willkomm)

I am anxious about the continual uncontrolled spread of primrose in the upper part of the lake. I urge the DNR to recognize the rapidly expanding growth of water primrose as a major threat to Lake Murray and to include the control of this plant in the 2005 plan. (Bacot)

It comes as no surprise to any of us that there is no plan to address the primrose problem and that DNR fails to even mention it. We are not in the more affluent section of the lake. (Sharpep2)

Response:

Aquatic vegetation in general is beneficial to the lake ecology and the plan clearly acknowledges this point by specifying as one of the management objectives (2.c.) to maintain diverse aquatic plant community. Along those lines, the DNR hopes to reinvigorate the Lake Murray Habitat Enhancement Program that it initiated several years ago to plant desirable native vegetation to enhance fish and wildlife habitat and help control shoreline erosion. Also, one of the main reasons for stocking while the lake was down is to be able to achieve control using fewer grass carp, thus minimizing the possibility of controlling too much of the vegetation.

This year's plan is consistent with the 2004 plan. The 2005 plan calls for no stocking of grass carp on Lake Murray unless hydrilla coverage exceeds 4,300 acres above the 330-foot contour at which time the Aquatic Plant Management Council may reconsider the need for additional grass carp. A late fall survey showed only 2,400 acres of hydrilla, a dramatic increase in that acreage would have to occur to consider stocking more carp. However, this year's plan does include the option of select herbicide control around municipal water intakes and high traffic landings if needed.

Water primrose is normally a shoreline species. It extends out into the water but is rooted close to the shoreline. During the two-year drawdown water primrose established its self at various locations throughout the upper part of Lake Murray. However, as water levels rise and the lake returns to its normal elevation, the water primrose problem is expected to subside. SCE&G and DNR will monitor the growth and extent of the primrose throughout 2005 and reconsider control options as needed.

Plan Modifications:

A long-term management goal is added in Section 12-f.

Section 12-f states: Water primrose - Water primrose, a shoreline plant, became problematic in the upper

portion of the lake last year. The two-year drawdown exposed a lot of unvegetated shoreline where water primrose quickly spread and re-established at the 345-348 foot contour level. While this plant can be invasive and cause localized problems, it has been in the lake for decades and is typically not a threat to general public access and use of the waterway. Based on past experience, it is expected that most of the plants that are rooted in deep water will not survive after the lake level returns to full pool. Therefore, there are no plans to control its growth this year. However, the SCDNR and SCE&G will monitor water primrose growth and consider control options if impacts are greater than anticipated.

Santee Cooper Lakes:

Comments:

What's this stuff I read on 2004 Santee Cooper about allowing fish to have 10% surface vegetation area for fish? What sense does that make? (Rae)

I implore you to not stock more grass carp in our impoundments. There are so many other methods, some are which expensive and you have listed in the management plan. Our natural resources, which include our fish and wildlife, need to be cared for with all parties in mind, not just hunters and fishermen, and not just wealthy property owners that ski and pleasure boat. (Williams)

One suggestion I have is that before we release more grass carp into any impoundments, let's consult B.A.S.S. or other organizations that have the funding and database to do the research. (Williams)

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 2005, 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 2005 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.

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 two sub-impoundments of Lake Marion, no grass carp are planned for any state waterways in 2005.

Plan Modifications:

None at present.