

Minutes of the South Carolina Aquatic Plant Management Council

1. Call to Order

Chairman Steve de Kozlowski called the 103rd meeting of the South Carolina Aquatic Plant Management Council to order at 10:15 am on January 13, 2010. The meeting was held in Room C of the Ramage Conference Center in Columbia, SC. This meeting was open to the public and ample notice had been provided according to Section 30-4-80 of the Freedom of Information Act.

Attendance:

Council members in attendance were Mr. John Inabinet, S.C. Public Service Authority; Mr. Stan Hutto, S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism; Mr. Jeff Thompson, S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control, Ocean and Coastal Resource Management; Mr. Cam Lay, Clemson University, Department of Pesticide Regulation; Mr. Mark Cribb, S.C. Department of Natural Resources, Land, Water, and Conservation Division; Mr. David Tompkins, S.C. Department of Agriculture; and Mr. Steven de Kozlowski, S.C. Department of Natural Resources, Land, Water, and Conservation Division.

Visitors in attendance were Chris Page, Michael Hook, and Walter Meitzen, S.C. Department of Natural Resources, Land, Water, and Conservation Division; Larry McCord and Chip Davis, S.C. Public Service Authority; Chance Bralley, S.C. BASS Federation; and Jay A'Hern, SCFishingReport.com.

2. Minutes of the November 17, 2009 Council Meeting

Chairman de Kozlowski pointed to corrections needed in the previous minutes. On page 5 the proposed meeting date should be changed from December 18th to November 18th. Thompson moved to accept the minutes as amended, Tompkins seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

3. Recommendations of the 2010 Santee Cooper/SCDNR Cooperative Meeting

Chairman de Kozlowski gave a summary of the cooperative agreement between SCDNR and Santee Cooper whereby a yearly meeting of biologists and managers is held. In the meeting, agency representatives identify common goals pertaining to aquatic plant management on the Santee Cooper lake system. Goals usually include targets for system wide vegetation levels; desirable plant populations are enhanced and undesirable populations are reduced through chemical treatments and sterile grass carp stockings. The goals are presented to the APMC as recommendations for the yearly aquatic plant management plan. The most recent meeting was held December 10, 2009.

Mr. McCord gave a presentation summarizing aquatic plant populations on the Santee Cooper lake system. Hydrilla coverage has increased since 2005 with the exception of 2008, when low water reduced all vegetation coverage. Coverage doubled from 2008 to 2009. Grass carp populations are declining. Water control structures restrict grass carp access to impoundments where Hydrilla now covers 300 acres despite past chemical treatments. In 2002, the only known Hydrilla population was in one impoundment. In subsequent years coverage increased in other impoundments and spread to the open lake. There are now approximately 300 acres of Hydrilla in impoundments and 540 acres in the open, main lake system. The dominant native submersed species, Vallisneria is growing in a diversity of habitat types but is being overtaken by Hydrilla. Total submersed vegetation in 2009 was between 16 and 18 thousand acres. This surpasses the goal for vegetation in the system before the inclusion of emergent or floating species.

Inabinet supplemented the presentation with a recent history of sterile grass carp stocking strategy in the lake system. A maintenance stocking plan was passed by the council in 1999. The plan provided for the resumption of grass carp stocking to maintain control of Hydrilla after its reemergence in the system. Carp were to be stocked to preserve population levels that existed during the last year of Hydrilla control. Inabinet said that control was apparently lost by 2005. The plan was put into action in 2007 when 2,600 grass carp were stocked bringing the lake-wide population up to 6,000 fish. In 2008 no carp were stocked. Low water conditions and a reluctance to jeopardize healthy native vegetation populations lead to that decision. Hydrilla spread beyond shallow areas to deeper water where carp had free access to the plants. A modified maintenance

stocking plan was adopted that set the goal for restocking grass carp to 2004 population levels (approximately 12,000 fish). This was based on the reasoning that this time period represents the last time that that Hydrilla was under control. 8,500 fish were stocked in 2009 to bring the population to 2004 levels. In 2009 Hydrilla spread in range and increased in area by 85%. It is outcompeting natives in many areas, jeopardizing the gains that have been made in fostering native plant communities.

Inabinet discussed Dr. Phil Kirk's research. He has recently done work pertaining to the appropriate grass carp stocking levels needed to control Hydrilla. The research prescribes a stocking strategy of 1 fish per 8 surface acres (1:8) or 1 fish per 20 vegetated acres (1:20), whichever is largest. This is implemented by Duke Power in North Carolina lakes and is being discussed for other lakes maintained by SCDNR. The 1:20 ratio was addressed by de Kozlowski who said that it applied to stocking levels appropriate to gain control and the 1:8 was for maintenance of that control. Inabinet pointed out that DNR fisheries biologist Scott Lamprecht believes that control has been lost on the Santee Cooper lake system. Inabinet said the current stocking plan of 12,000 fish equates to 1 fish per 13 surface acres. At the most recent cooperative meeting the 1:8 stocking rate was agreed upon as the preferred management strategy. Therefore, participants of the cooperative meeting recommend that the council adopt the 1:8 stocking rate. This would bring the lake-wide population of grass carp to 20,060 fish.

A discussion ensued regarding the potential of exponential Hydrilla growth, the importance of combining chemical treatments with carp stocking, and the economic ramifications associated with allowing Hydrilla to grow unchecked. McCord stressed that the competition placed on native communities by Hydrilla is the largest threat to those communities' long term survival. Several discussants voiced the view that a population of 20,000 grass carp would not negatively impact the native communities. Inabinet and de Kozlowski discussed the need for further research regarding grass carp population decline and Hydrilla tuber longevity especially in systems like the Santee Cooper lake system. The point was made that while a change in approach to the 1:8 stocking rate was a small change based on new information, the council should stick to its principle of balancing flexibility with consistency.

4. Final Draft 2010 Aquatic Plant Management Plan to be released for public comments

Chairman de Kozlowski directed council members to their packet of handouts. In it was an excerpt from the Draft 2010 Aquatic Plant Management Plan (draft plan). First for consideration was the section regarding the Santee Cooper lake system grass carp stocking strategy. It summarized the stocking regime necessary to effect the 1:8 approach. An agreement was reached to round the lake-wide grass carp population target from 20,064 to 20,000. This would require stocking 11,790 grass carp in 2010 and 6,400 grass carp each subsequent year to compensate for annual mortality.

The final sentences of the stocking strategy summary addressed the distribution of the yearly stockings. Original verbiage prescribed an even split of the fish between the two lakes. It was agreed that an explicit discussion of the split was not necessary and verbiage should indicate that the occurrence of Hydrilla will dictate stocking locations.

Lay moved to accept the Santee Cooper grass carp stocking strategy portion of the draft plan as amended. Thompson seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Chairman de Kozlowski summarized other situations on the Santee Copper lake system. Specifically mentioned was the planned treatment of 1,000 acres of crested floating heart; the northernmost known population of this invasive plant. Inabinet expressed the concern that the species will expand through the system and beyond carried by water currents and boats. The chairman urged Mr. McCord and Mr. A'Hern to collaborate on a public awareness message.

Thompson moved to approve the amended Santee Cooper lake management section of the draft plan. The motion was seconded by Tompkins and carried unanimously.

Page continued with an overview of the draft plan. He pointed to a handout of a spreadsheet that summarized planned grass carp stockings in other water bodies around the state. Goose Creek Reservoir will receive 870 carp; 720 to compensate for annual mortality and 150 to control *Hygrophila polysperma* populations. Lake Greenwood will receive 3,756 carp; 1,056 to compensate for annual mortality and 2,700 to combat increased Hydrilla coverage. Lake Cunningham will receive 216 carp to compensate for annual mortality. State Lakes numbers have not been submitted and are not currently included. Lake Murray plans have not changed, no carp will be stocked. Carp population

there should be near the 1:8 level. Surveys will be intensified in the near future.

Page discussed other changes and overall trends in the plan. Most expected acreages have been decreased, herbicides have been added, and application rates have been changed. The Caw-Caw Interpretive Center has been added to the plan. A population of Phragmites there has been under treatment for two years and its extent is decreasing. Other Phragmites numbers are largely unchanged from last year.

Hutto informed the council that a new bridge constructed at Santee State Park will prohibit access to treatment areas and therefore the park should be removed from the plan. Page recapped treatments in the state parks including an algae bloom in Charlestowne Landing. Funding is currently in place to carry out planned treatments in the state parks.

The chairman stressed that items in the draft plan are the intentions of management personnel and are contingent upon many factors including funding availability. Inabinet moved to approve the Draft 2010 Aquatic Plant Management Plan as amended for submission for public review and comment. Lay seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

Page recapped the upcoming draft plan process pertaining to public comment and revision. The plan will be posted to the DNR website, a news release will go out, and past participants and potentially interested parties will be directly notified. This begins the 30-day public review and comment period. At the end of this period, all comments will be reviewed, necessary modifications will be made, and the plan will be resubmitted to the council for approval at its next meeting. All comments and any resulting modifications will be included in the final plan.

5. Other Business

The chairman reminded the Council that the date of the next scheduled council meeting is March 11, 2010, location to be determined.

Page brought the council's attention to a handout that summarized aquatic nuisance species treatment operations for the treatment year 2009.

The chairman added that the current yearly cooperative agreement between DNR and Santee Cooper is in process and will be signed soon.

Additionally, the federal Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force sent written approval of the state's Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan along with notification of available grant funds and the application process. Application for funding will be submitted this month. Any funds received will likely be targeted toward education. De Kozlowski informed the council that modifications to the plan would likely entail regularly reconvening the state Aquatic Invasive Species Task Force and bringing new issues to its attention for approval and development into an operational plan. Page described other action items of the Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan including establishing the task force by law and developing a formal early detection/rapid response procedure. Early detection/rapid response protocols are already being developed, and like those in other states, will follow an incident command structure. Money is needed for early detection/rapid response operational costs. Educational materials are currently being developed that could take advantage of funds allocated to public education.

Page and Lay discussed the progress of listing crested floating heart on Clemson University's noxious plant list. Lay suggested that after current personnel changes the best course of action would be to contact David Howle, the acting Head of the Department of Pesticide Regulation. A discussion ensued regarding the importance of public awareness regarding aquatic invasive species. Davis informed the attendees of an upcoming ETV 'Making it Grow' segment focused on crested floating heart.

6. Adjournment

Being no further business the Council adjourned at 12:05 p.m.