

Minutes of the South Carolina Aquatic Plant Management Council

1. Call to Order

Chairman Chris Page called the 106th meeting of the South Carolina Aquatic Plant Management Council to order at 10:10 am on January 20, 2011. The meeting was held in room 301 of the Rembert C Dennis Building, 1000 Assembly St., Columbia, SC 29201. 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; Mrs. Jeannie Eidson, S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control; Mr. Bob Perry S.C. Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division; Mr. Cam Lay, Clemson University, Department of Pesticide Regulation; and Mr. Mark Cribb, S.C. Department of Natural Resources, Land, Water, and Conservation Division.

Visitors in attendance were Michael Hook, and Walter Meitzen, S.C. Department of Natural Resources, Land, Water, and Conservation Division; Larry McCord, John Morrison, and Chip Davis, S.C. Public Service Authority; Don Winslow, S.C. Department of Natural Resources; and Mr. Stephen de Kozlowski.

2. Minutes of the November 18, 2010 Council Meeting

Eidson brought it to the attention of the council that a statement referring to the infeasibility of determining a true hydrilla acreage with current techniques was worded such that it seemed to reflect a conclusion drawn by the council when in fact it was a statement made by someone in attendance. Lay moved to change the wording from “the point was made” to “a comment was made” to better reflect the nature of the statement. Eidson seconded and the motion carried. Eidson moved to accept the minutes as amended and Lay seconded, the motion carried unanimously.

3. Recommendations of the 2011 Santee Cooper/SCDNR Cooperative Meeting

The chairman began with a suggestion to tie the discussion of the recommendations of the cooperative meeting to the discussion of the sections pertaining to the Santee Cooper lakes in the Draft 2011 South Carolina Aquatic Plant Management Plan (hereafter, Draft 2011 Plan). He proceeded with a meeting overview. Discussion points included hydrilla coverage and its increases (1,250 acres, up from last year's coverage of 800 acres). These surveys generally err on the conservative side such that true acreages may be slightly higher.

Mr. McCord offered the observation that in the main body of the lake, coverage increased by 100% from 2009 to 2010.

Page continued his overview. Native vegetation increased by roughly 350 acres over the same time period. A concern is that increasing hydrilla coverage is displacing native vegetation, and examples of that have been seen in this recent hydrilla expansion. In the DNR meeting which preceded the DNR/Santee Cooper meeting a call was made to increase the target carp population to 40,000 to address the current expansion. The current target population, as dictated by maintenance stocking protocols is 20,000. Through discussion at both the DNR and the DNR/Santee Cooper cooperative meetings, a compromise was reached that approximated a middle point between the two targets.

Mr. Inabinet offered to discuss the reasoning behind the compromise. During its previous meeting, the council concluded that based on current carp numbers and hydrilla coverage, the carp population was at the threshold between maintenance and control. A proposal was made at the cooperative meeting to supplement the current base-line, maintenance-level population of 20,000 carp with a onetime stocking to address the approximately 800 acre coverage in the main lake. This supplemental stocking would be done at 25 carp per vegetated acre (25 carp/acre X 800 acres). This would equate to 20,000 supplemental carp which would bring the total population to 40,000. This proposal was offered by a DNR Fisheries biologist familiar with the Santee Cooper lake system and the science behind the stocking recommendation model. He suggested that the model did not necessarily account for the peculiarities of this lake system and that the model could be expected to misrepresent the appropriate stocking rate to some degree.

Inabinet reiterated that at current hydrilla coverage levels, any increase in coverage would dictate a shift from maintenance to control protocols.

Inabinet continued by saying that the rationale behind the eventual compromise stocking was to account for last year's 450 acre increase. This would dictate a supplemental stocking of 11,250 carp (25 carp/acre X 450 acres), bringing the total to 31,250. Inabinet confirmed that hydrilla is displacing vallisneria. Hydrilla has been seen in monospecific stands in areas where it previously had not been. These include areas deep enough to allow carp access. Hydrilla increases were prominent in lower Lake Marion and in Lake Moultrie from the northeast to the southwest shores.

Mr. de Kozlowski asked for clarification regarding hydrilla coverage especially with respect to sub-impoundments. Mr. McCord offered the following coverage totals: 2010, 1,250 acres; 2009, 800 acres; 2008, 453 acres; 2007, 594 acres; 2006, 445 acres; and 2005, 200 acres. The anomalous drop in coverage between 2007 and 2008 was attributed to the low water levels associated with that period's drought. These totals include all infested sub-impoundments (approximately 400 acres). The most recent increase in the main lake body (excluding sub-impoundments) was also approximately 400 acres. Not only are these increases troubling, but their locations are as well.

A discussion ensued regarding the significance of the rate of increase in hydrilla coverage. Inabinet pointed to the resemblance between recent growth and that seen before carp stocking in that a doubling of coverage was often seen one year to the next. Eidson reminded the council that the decision not to stock in past years affected the age class structure of the carp population. This could be one reason the carp are not delivering the expected level of control. A onetime increased stocking could mitigate the effects of the broken age class structure. Page pointed out that all past stockings have been done with the best intentions and the best information available at the time. The Santee Cooper lake system is peculiar and the appropriate rate for the system seems to be near to current stocking targets. Eidson reiterated the issue of native vegetation displacement and McCord stated that the displacement rate was one to one, i.e. each acre of hydrilla expansion equated to one lost acre of native vegetation.

The discussion continued regarding the peculiarities of the lake system, the specific applicability of the stocking model, the relative worth of onetime stockings

versus long term baseline increases, the displacement of native vegetation by hydrilla, the distribution of the current increases, and the history of the stocking plan. The council sought to determine the appropriate course of action for the coming year, to establish reasonable expectations for vegetation responses to future carp stockings, and to provide for an adaptive management framework to respond to the future needs of the system.

In the end the council agreed that a onetime, supplemental stocking to address the recent hydrilla increase was warranted. The supplemental stocking level would be of 10,000 carp, slightly less than the 11,250 indicated by the protocols discussed above. This would bring the in-lake carp population to 30,000 fish. Thereafter, if hydrilla responded well to the supplemental stocking, stockings would seek only to sustain the 20,000 carp population target (6,400 carp annually).

The Chairman called for a motion on the immediate course of action. Lay moved to propose a stocking of 16,400 fish. This represents the 6,400 fish necessary to offset annual mortality of the current carp population (to be continued yearly) and a onetime, supplemental stocking of 10,000 fish to address the resent expansion of hydrilla. The motion carried.

4. Review, Discussion, and Approval of the Draft 2011 S.C. Aquatic Plant Management Plan for public comment.

Mr. Page began an overview of the Draft 2011 Plan. He pointed to efforts to correct minor inconsistencies in formatting and also to clerical items that were pending and not yet correctly reflected. Mr. Hook spoke of water body specifics, especially other carp stocking plans and items that changed from last year to this. Generally, expected treatment acreages decreased per water body except for areas in the Pee Dee. Cold weather reduced alligator flea beetle populations and alligatorweed infestations increased. This was exacerbated by the fact that beetles were not available for stocking last spring. He mentioned that the carp population in Lake Murray deserves consideration for augmentation and that should be part of the 2012 Plan discussion. No carp stocking is planned for Lake Greenwood. Maintenance stockings continue in Goose Creek Reservoir where hydrilla and hygrophila are both reduced. Page added that no carp stocking was planned for Lake Cunningham though herbicide work was expected to continue. He

asked for recommendations for any changes that were needed. Lay asked that The Department of Pesticide Regulation be added to the list of emergency contacts in cases of spills. Page referred members to the appendix that pertained to new NPDES protocols.

Inabinet asked for an update on the Aquatic Plant Management Trust Fund. Page reported that a fairly steady balance of \$250,000 to \$275,000 was maintained through the recoupment of funds from partnering agencies. The status of the Water-Rec funds was less clear as were the future use and distribution of those funds. Mr. de Kozlowski explained the history of the trust fund and some of the past trends and uses of it.

Inabinet brought it to the council's attention that the Draft 2011 Plan reflected no cost share with Santee Cooper over the 2010 treatment year. This was unprecedented. Grass carp were purchased in 2010 by DNR which amounted to 4% of the plant management budget of Santee Cooper. Furthermore the Draft 2011 Plan had no provision to allow for cost share in the coming year. A discussion ensued regarding the nature of the relationship between DNR and Santee Cooper and how current and past transactions were calculated, facilitated, and justified. A point was made that regardless of current budget status, the council should at least have a mechanism in place for the transfer of funds through cost share agreements. The amount of those funds, if any, would ultimately be decided upon by the management of the agencies. Eidson made a motion to preserve the cost share structure that was stipulated in the 2010 Plan. The motion was seconded and carried unanimously.

Page asked that any additional changes be submitted via email and called for a motion to accept the plan and electronically submitted changes. Mr. Cribb moved and Lay seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

5. Other Business

The Chairman discussed the upcoming NPDES permitting regulations and stated that few changes had been made since the last meeting. Eidson added that a public hearing was scheduled for January 25th, public comments are to be finalized on the 28th, and the regulations would go into effect on April 9th.

Page asked Eidson to look into EPA regulations regarding the use of 2,4-D on water intake lakes. Santee Cooper previously received information from the EPA regarding lakes with water intakes which seems to contradict 2,4-D labels.

Page informed the council of his intent to write a letter to Clemson DPR on behalf of the council to include crested floating heart on their noxious weed list. He continued that similar efforts could be made regarding the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Natural Resources.

Page told the council of an advertisement campaign that will soon be underway that takes advantage of federal funding intended to spread the “Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers” message. This funding should also allow for the staffing of an information booth at SEWE. Furthermore, the Aquatic Invasive Species Task Force will have to be reconstituted to amend the state plan which could lead to funds including treatment funds.

Riverbanks Zoo contacted Mr. Page and asked for his input on their plans for a display of Island Apple Snails. DNR will try to provide specimens the spring.

The Chairman then presented Mr. de Kozlowski with a commemorative plaque thanking him for his service to the council. He thanked the council and all of the people that worked in conjunction with the council on invasive plant management in the state.

The Chairman then congratulated Mr. Hook on the recent completion of his Masters Degree.

Page inquired with Perry about Lake Thurman. He mentioned DNR’s recent cooperation on hydrilla and AVM surveys. Currently, there appears to be approximately 7,000 acres of hydrilla. Hook expounded on AVM impacts. Coots, eagles, geese, and ring neck ducks were known to be affected. Thus far this year 3 eagle deaths have been attributed to AVM with a fourth under investigation. AVM impacts on the bird population increased from last year to this. Perry recounted talks between the South Carolina and Georgia Departments of Natural Resources three or four years ago that led to a jointly drafted letter that was submitted to the Corps of Engineers. The Corps left action to the state agencies. This coincided with a large drought that decreased hydrilla coverage, the issue languished. Perry continued, saying now that lake levels are returning to normal, talks could resume. Overall, eagles are doing well. Lake Thurman is a small hole in an otherwise positive landscape. Therefore eagle mortalities will not be seen as

an impetus for action on the hydrilla infestation. Some council members postulated that the issue would be seen differently if the source of the eagle deaths was a manmade pollutant, the point being that action could be taken to mitigate the situation. Perry advocated a three party, cooperative discussion on the overall hydrilla issue, preceded by a consensus within SCDNR concerning the need to move forward to talks with Georgia DNR and ultimately the Corps. Page suggested that the loss of waterfowl may add weight to the argument. Both agreed that not knowing the true extent of the impact complicated the issue. Page spoke of attitudes within Corps staff and among the biologists. Points of view differ in the severity of the problems associated with the hydrilla infestation. The Corps is mandated to control invasive species. Perry reiterated the propriety of the path to three party talks.

6. March Meeting Date

Page elicited the input of council members regarding the date of the upcoming council meeting. The current scheduled date is March 17th, 10:00 a.m., in room 302 of the Dennis building. No objections were offered. Perry informed members that the approved plan will be submitted to the DNR board for their information on the 25th of March and they could be expected to act on the plan at their subsequent meeting in April.

7. Adjournment

Being no further business the Council adjourned at 12:30 p.m.