

Minutes of the South Carolina Aquatic Plant Management Council

1. Call to Order

Steven de Kozlowski called the 94th meeting of the South Carolina Aquatic Plant Management Council to order at 10:04 am on March 15, 2007 in the board room of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, in the Rembert C. Dennis Building, 1000 Assembly St., in Columbia, S.C. 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. He then introduced Representative Lowe, Von Snelgrove, and Ron Keppyn of the SC Bass Federation.

Attendance:

Council members in attendance were Mr. John Inabinet, S.C. Public Service Authority; Mr. Bob Perry, S.C. Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries; Ms. Jeannie Eidson, S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control; Mr. Stan Hutto, S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism; Mr. Marc Cribb, S.C. Department of Natural Resources, and Mr. Steven de Kozlowski, S.C. Department of Natural Resources, Land, Water and Conservation Division.

Visitors in attendance were Representative Phillip Lowe, SC house of Representatives; Ron Keppyn of the SC BASS federation; Von Snelgrove, Chris Page, Michael Hook, S.C. Department of Natural Resources, Land, Water and Conservation Division.

2. Minutes of the Feb. 1, 2007 Council Meeting

The minutes were reviewed and a motion to accept the minutes by Inabinet was made and seconded by Cribb. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Draft 2007 South Carolina Aquatic Plant Management Plan

Rep. Lowe was given the floor to speak about the release of grass carp.

Rep. Lowe mentioned he has lived on Santee for years, and that he understands that Santee Cooper is in the business to generate power, understands that the grass carp work, and understands we want to balance hydrilla control, but he is concerned for waterfowl

and fishing. He wants to be cautious using fish and doesn't think it's the right time to stock. He fully supports the use of carp to control hydrilla over spraying. He stated that he believes John Inabinet and the Council are trying to do right but wants to wait one more year on stocking.

De Kozlowski stated that we are trying to balance our approach to the hydrilla problem and it is up to the whole council to reach a decision and thanked Rep. Lowe for speaking.

Chris Page was given the floor to go over any changes to the plan.

Page stated that there have been no changes made to the 2007 plan since the final draft. Although right now it looks as if item #24, Tyger River Waterfowl Area will not be completed. We will be providing information and technical advice but not actually treating the area. Also this year is the first year in a while that the plan will include the SCDNR's managed lakes. Otherwise, there have been no changes to the draft 2007 plan.

Public review of the plan included 3 comments total. One comment was on the East Cooper River. It was said that we weren't doing enough, on French Quarter Creek the water hyacinth had been removed but now alligatorweed and water primrose had taken over. They suggested grass carp but this idea is not feasible. Last year we spent \$12,000 out of \$32,000 available in the Cooper River system because of lack of time and man power.

Inabinet questioned if we have funds from Berkeley County this year. Page stated that we have a verbal commitment.

De Kozlowski agreed that time will still be a constraint this year, and asked about using a helicopter. He also stated that hopefully, we'll have three people working soon and we will work hard to get as much as possible done this year.

Page continued with the comments. As for the Santee Cooper Lakes, we had two

comments, Mr. Suggs and Rep. Lowe. Both are opposed to the carp and mentioned that the existing carp are sufficient. Both state that regrowth on the Santee Cooper system isn't where it needs to be before restocking. Our response will be that the vegetated acreage has gone up drastically and that we will be doing additional habitat enhancement work.

Inabinet mentioned that some comments are made on emotion. We have never lost all vegetation on Santee and water quality is up.

Page also added that fisheries data from the SCDNR suggests that bass populations are good but stripers are hurting a little. The tournaments are also turning in record catches.

Inabinet stated that as far as waterfowl data, from 1963 until hydrilla there was an 80% decrease, during hydrilla there was a 15% increase, then another decrease; and the last two fishing tournaments provided record catches.

Mr. Keppyn was then given the floor and stated that the SC Bass Federation, BASS, and BASS ESPN view the release of more grass carp in a negative light. He also stated that he spent 31 years in state government and is the Conservation Biologist for the SC BASS Federation. He wants to use a proactive management strategy, He is helping reestablish vegetation on Lake Hartwell and Lake Russell with BASS and SCDNR fisheries section, He agrees that carp are effective but they are not selective, they'll "eat the cake and ice-cream first and then on down the line". He also offers if there is anything the Bass Federation can do to help please let them know.

De Kozlowski stated that the Council and SCDNR have worked with BASS since 1994 and like the newsletter and its efforts and also inquired if the plan got out to the BASS members in a timely manner? Mr. Keppyn stated "Yes, sort of".

De Kozlowski thanked Mr. Keppyn for his input and for coming.

Page continued with the comments including that Goose Creek has grass carp too, but no

comments. We need to get habitat enhancement up and running. Maybe need to add verbage into the plan in respect with habitat enhancement plantings.

Discussion ensued concerning Rep. Lowe and Mr. Keppyn's issues and comments

Inabinet stated that Santee Cooper spoke with Rep. Lowe for several hours yesterday, but not much headway was made.

Eidson asked if Rep. Lowe was representing from any specific group.

Inabinet stated that he did not think that he represented any specific entity, but that he is a frequent visitor of SC Ducks webpage, a freshman Representative, in it for the advancement of waterfowl.

De Kozlowski asked Bob Perry if he could provide insight of the duck hunting community. Bob Perry stated that many factors are causing the decline in ducks. Diving ducks did influence duck numbers during the hydrilla heyday. They are pioneering ducks that are not reliable. It's tough to tell people of all the factors causing problems for the ducks. There is no magic bullet for the problems. It will take a slow process and years to grow waterfowl numbers. Sam Chappellear, Regional Wildlife Coordinator, sent in the numbers for last year. Perry shared the data and graphs with the Council. All numbers have jumped up and give a good flat line for recent years. Santee National Wildlife Refuge Duck numbers are up a little this year too. It would be great to include this data in the responses. Since members of the General Assembly are concerned let's get the most of it and respectfully address all aspects with science background. We need to point out that Santee Cooper is still the best largemouth bass lake, water quality is up, waterfowl numbers are up and most importantly we are working on habitat enhancement. Rep. Lowe took the time to come so we need to follow up.

Eidson agreed with Perry. How hard would it be to find all old acknowledgements and transcripts and don't underplay the "ALL" factor. There was a significant impact last

time. We should include aerials, Bob's graph, and even though it may not change peoples mind it documents that we did use science. It will have more clout if we show we looked at all angles and all of the details in reaching this decision. It would also show that we have been looking at all of these options for a period of years and that this is not a knee-jerk reaction.

Discussion continued about the plan and what issues may come up in the subsequent SCDNR Board meeting concerning approval of the plan and how a letter Rep. Lowe had circulated on the House floor may impact it. It is important to know that there is a possibility that they deny? They can approve, disapprove, or say come back next month. Inabinet added that Rep. Lowe and Santee Cooper have the same goal, they just disagree how to get there. Santee Cooper wants a native system not one dominated by an invasive species.

Inabinet made a motion to accept the 2007 plan as written, Perry seconded.

The Council approved the 2007 plan as written unanimously.

4. Other Business

De Kozlowski added that controlling invasives in private waterbodies with their consent and using cost shares, for example water hyacinth in ricefields on the Cooper River and Giant Salvinia at Delta Plantation. But what if they don't agree? What leverage do we have? We are having monecious hydrilla spreading from Thurmond so the question is, is this something we want to discuss? Or are we just going to stick to early detection and rapid response?

Discussion ensued and Inabinet stated that we may need more input from the legal section of DNR.

De Kozlowski stated that SCDNR will pursue co-operative agreements and get clear interpretations of the laws. Also, Corps of Engineers funding is non-existence but we are getting Charleston COE funding for the treatment of Phragmites in the Charleston harbor.

The AIS taskforce is meeting on the 29th and are working right along. And lastly, in the July/August South Carolina Wildlife magazine there will be an insert on invasives.

John Hensel is retiring and stepping down from the Council. Jeff Thompson will be his replacement.

5. Adjournment

Being no further business the Council adjourned at 11:35 am.