Minutes

145th Meeting of the South Carolina Aquatic Plant Management Council

Microsoft Teams

Wednesday, January 22nd, 2025, 10:00am

Attendees:

Council Members: Julie Holling, Willie Simmons, Chad Altman, Bill Marshall, Casey Moorer, Stacy Scherman, Chris Stout, Tammy Lognion

Guests: Riley Eldridge, Matthew S. Baumann, Joseph Dress, Allan Stack, Chris Thomason, Carl Bussells, Judson Riser, Erin Tucker, Billy Chastain, Steve Meyer, Julie Davis, Chad Holbrook, Ann Clark, Ernie Guerry, Ashley Graham, Jason Thompson, Eryn Molloy

1. Call to Order of 145th Meeting

Chairman Holling called the 145th meeting of the South Carolina Aquatic Plant Management Council (Council) to order at 10:03 am. Notice of the meeting was posted and distributed as required by law. She provided a few reminders about how the meeting would be run and that it was being recorded. She noted that most of the votes would be roll call votes and she would abstain unless there was a tie. She welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. She had everyone introduce themselves.

2. Review and Approval of the Minutes of the March 6th, 2024 (144th) Council Meeting

Ms. Holling asked if anyone had any changes or corrections to the minutes from the last meeting. No corrections or changes were noted. She asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Moorer made a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Scherman seconded the motion. Ms. Holling called the motion to a vote, and it passed unanimously.

3. Public Comment Period

Ms. Holling asked if there were any public comments to be made by the public. There were no comments.

4. Recap of 2024 Aquatic Control Operations

Ms. Holling proceeded with her presentation, acknowledging the Aquatic Nuisance Plant Program has moved from the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) to the South Carolina Department of Environmental Services (SCDES). Control by species is down, as well as cost, due to issues during the transition from SCDNR to SCDES. Alligator flea beetles were introduced on the Ashepoo River and Black River. She moved to the control by waterbody slide, which showed the Williams Station intake on Back River Reservoir. Their protective fence was broken through due to the amount of vegetation that flowed in. A backhoe was utilized to help remedy the situation, in addition to some treatments. Other waterbodies treated included Broadway Lake, Combahee River, Cooper River, Goose Creek Reservoir, Pages Millpond, SCDNR Wildlife Management Areas, and State Parks. The primary goal for the state parks is clearing the edges for fishing, swimming, and boating. Triploid grass carp numbers were increased for Lake Keowee and Lake Murray due to vegetation issues. All other lakes were

maintenance stockings, except Broadway Lake was an initial stocking. Ms. Holling finished presentation with a call for questions. There were no questions.

Mr. Holbrook with Santee Cooper (S-C) began his presentation. In total for chemical control, giant salvinia was the main plant of concern with 6,560 acres treated in lakes Marion and Moultrie. S-C also saw an increase in water hyacinth in 2024 due to Hurricane Helene pushing it out of the swamps of upper Marion. For the 2024 season, *Vallisneria* treatments, of 33 acres, was done only when property owners called with concerns. Over the last six years, a significant increase of total acres treated has been seen due to the increase in giant salvinia. In 2024, a slight decrease in treated acreage was seen due to equipment issues (S-C and contractors), as well as Hurricane Helene causing high water levels and turbidity. Historically, the levels of crested floating heart have decreased. The plan for 2024 during late summer and early fall was to treat *Hydrilla*, however this coincided with Hurricane Helene, leading to less acreage of *Hydrilla* being treated. Eurasian watermilfoil persists in two creek arms on the northern side of Lake Marion, but is relatively well contained, but this Eurasian watermilfoil is mixed with *Hydrilla,* potentially leading to higher levels of *Hydrilla*. Overall, residential spray requests have increased since 2020, likely due to an increase in giant salvinia causing issues for people's boat ramps. S-C has made it easier to contact them for these spray requests. The slight decrease in residential spray requests in 2024 is likely due to Hurricane Helene. In 2024, 16,580 triploid grass carp were stocked between Lake Marion (5 sites) and Lake Moultrie (4 sites). The goal was to stock grass carp in sites with high levels of *Hydrilla* nearby. In 2023, approximately 106,000 giant salvinia weevil were stocked in Lake Moultrie. In 2024, approximately 154,000 giant salvinia weevil were stocked in Lake Marion and approximately 20,000 were translocated within Lake Moultrie due to evidence of overwintering at the 2023 stocking location. It was found that the weevils had spread at least 500 feet from the stocking location with relatively high densities of the weevils. Mr. Holbrook opened the floor for questions. Ms. Molloy asked what species of *Vallisneria* is being seen. Mr. Holbrook and Mr. Bussells said it is *V. neotropicalis*. There were no other questions.

5. S-C Plant Survey Results and Grass Carp Recommendation

The results from the 2024 Vegetation Survey, that S-C conducts every year, showed that *Hydrilla* occurred at the highest rate, 5,617 acres. *Salvinia* covered 2,401 acres, but this number is grossly underestimated due to large mats of *Salvinia* congregating under cypress tree canopy. In 2024, native submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) mapped decreased, likely due to a heavy mix of *Hydrilla* being present. A significant increase between 2022 and 2023 of *Hydrilla* mapped was seen. In the 2024 *Hydrilla* map, it was found that some spots of *Hydrilla* were not mapped, accounting for 1,603 acres of Lake Moultrie and 633 acres of Lake Marion, leading to a total estimate of 8,094 acres of *Hydrilla* between both lakes. The driver of the *Hydrilla* population is consistent with the population of the grass carp. In the past, a large spike of *Hydrilla* has been met with a large spike in grass carp which has led to a decrease in native SAV, so a different approach is being taken. For 2025, the plan is to increase the grass carp population from 40,006 to 50,000 to have a ratio of 1 fish to 3.2 surface acres of water (the 2024 ratio was 1 fish to 4 surface acres of water) to see if the expansion of hydrilla can be slowed rather than crashed. An increase in carp stocking number is due in part to the largest spill event in Project history, approximately 160,000 cubic feet per second peak spilling flow in October 2024. Also, chemical control of *Hydrilla* is not financially realistic due to the price of chemical treatment being approximately

$1,000/acre (when treating *Hydrilla,* the entire water column must be treated). The overall goal of S-C is to maintain as much native SAV as possible and manage *Hydrilla* for the benefit of fish and wildlife, but not to the detriment of all other user groups.

The floor was opened for questions. Ms. Graham asked what company was used for the satellite mapping and why some *Hydrilla* may not be picked up by the satellite. Mr. Holbrook said that SePRO and Remetrix is used to conduct the satellite survey. The *Hydrilla* not showing up is likely due to increased turbidity however the survey was completed before Hurricane Helene. If the plant is not within 12 to 18 inches of the surface, the satellite will not pick up the presence of the *Hydrilla*. Ms. Graham then asked if the satellite survey is still considered useful. Mr. Holbrook said that the trend and methodology staying consistent is important. While it is disappointing that not all the *Hydrilla* is being detected, this option is still the best option that S-C has seen. Ms. Graham was thankful for Mr. Holbrook's response, and Mr. Holbrook offered to speak more about the subject via email and encouraged Ms. Graham to speak to Ms. Moorer as well. Mr. Simmons asked what other methods for ground truthing were used. Mr. Holbrook stated that acres treated, and boat surveys are used to draw polygons on Google Earth to add acres otherwise not detected. Mr. Bussells stated that S-C also goes out with Remetrix staff, placing data points on the lake while the satellite passes over, helping to get finer details collected. There were no other questions.

6. Grass Carp and Game Fish Update

Mr. Meyer with the SCDNR, Region 4 began his presentation. Projects on S-C Lakes include grass carp monitoring, largemouth bass (LMB) electrofishing, winter gillnetting, fish attractor array, and aquatic vegetation planting. Grass carp monitoring during 2022 to 2024 found that of the 83 individuals collected, the age of the fish ranged from 1 to 20+, and total length ranged from 350 millimeters (mm) to 1249 mm. Growth levels to around 1060 mm at age 7. A weight to length relation developed in 1994 is still used to determine condition, and it was found that age had the most significant effect on condition with individuals in the best condition being younger fish. LMB electrofishing was conducted in Lake Marion in 2024 and will be conducted in Lake Moultrie in 2025. Approximately 90 LMB are collected per zone, and length, weight, and age data were recorded. Winter gillnetting was conducted from December to February with the main targets being striped bass and blue catfish. The netting utilized was approximately 700 total feet, with half of it sinking and the other half floating and mesh size varying from 2 to 8 inches stretched. Striped bass are experiencing a less than 10% natural recruitment in the system. There's a decreasing size and catch rate, leading to a hatchery dominated system. A decrease in age 2 individuals has also been seen. The trend over the last few years has also shown a decrease in catch rates of striped bass. For blue catfish, there's an increase in population size but a decrease in individual size. This has led to stakeholder conflict over limits and commercial fishing. Trends over the last few years have shown an increase in the catch rate of blue catfish while condition has decreased and leveled off. Fish attractor array on Lake Moultrie and Lake Marion are brushed yearly with wax myrtle, Christmas trees, and other brush. Lake Moultrie received 19 attractors while Lake Marion received 16 attractors. Water willow planting is done every year where water willow is relocated to areas in need of native aquatic plants.

Mr. Meyer opened the floor for questions. Ms. Holling asked if there's a relationship between the number of fish collected and vegetation being seen. Mr. Meyer stated that larger number of bass are

seen in areas with *Salvinia*, and that other areas with *Salvinia* may get caught in gillnets. Mr. Holbrook asked what is being seen as far as the age 1 LMB and a correlation with vegetation. Mr. Meyers said no information is currently known, but that this correlation should be looked at. Ms. Holling asked if any surveys on crappie have been conducted. Mr. Meyers said that crappie have been surveyed for the last 3 years however it has not been consistent and has not become an official survey. It has been hard to find juvenile crappie on Lake Moultrie, but there are hopes to standardize the sampling/surveying of crappie. Ms. Holling asked if there are any smaller feeder fish that may be feeding on or around the vegetation. Mr. Meyers said no sampling has been done on sunfish on these lakes. There were no other questions.

7. Review and Approval of 2025 Draft Plan for Public Comment

Ms. Holling moved onto discussions and changes to the draft plan. Ms. Holling made some minor changes in grammar, agency information, council member agency list, added some more updated information on water withdrawal in the "Surface Water Resources Section", and added *Hydrilla* and giant salvinia to troublesome species list. She also added an alternate name of Bushy Park for Back River Reservoir. She decreased carp stocking in Broadway Lake to 75 fish to replace some lost to mortality and added information on dissolved oxygen for Back River and Goose Creek reservoirs. She decreased the grass carp stocking in Lake Greenwood to zero due to decreased *Hydrilla*. The carp stocking request for Lake Keowee was reduced to a maintenance stocking. Lake Murray's carp request was increased to 5,000 based on the survey done by Dominion staff, which estimated 4,100 acres of invasive vegetation. She agreed with the S-C recommendation for additional grass carp based on *Hydrilla* surveys. Grass carp were requested for King's Mountain and Paris Mountain State Parks. Appendix B was adjusted some, but more information needs to be corrected before final approval. Appendix C was not adjusted due to the correcting legislation on Section 49 not being passed. Ms. Holling noted that she made some additional corrections after she sent the draft out. She made the State Park names match what is in the State Park system, added alligator weed to Back River, and corrected the discrimination complaint address at the end of both documents. Mr. Simmons wanted to know if a survey on Lake Murray was conducted this year. Ms. Holling said that the survey done in 2023 was a limited, small area survey. Because Dominion conducts a shoreline survey each year, they looked to see what vegetation was present and estimated acreage, finding 4,100 acres of vegetation in the system with the majority being curly leaf pond weed and a 13-acre patch of *Hydrilla* in one cove. Mr. Chastain said Ms. Holling's response was accurate.

Ms. Scherman stated that Oconee State Park was not included in the plan. Two ponds, one 20 acres and the other 10 acres, have issues with fishing pressure and bladderwort. Ms. Scherman made a motion to add Oconee State Park, as well as to add 120 grass carp to the main lake. Ms. Holling called for a second. Ms. Moorer seconded the motion. There were no questions, comments, or concerns. Ms. Holling called the motion to a vote, and the motion passed unanimously. Ms. Holling asked if there's any concern on the number of grass carp recommended for S-C. Mr. Marshall stated that the presentation was great but would like the information to be made more available to the public. Ms. Holling asked if any additional information could be added to the plan or how that information could be made to the public. Ms. Moorer suggested putting together a packet for the general public before the public comment period. Ms. Holling said the packet could be posted with the draft plan. Ms. Moorer agreed. Mr. Simmons asked if this packet would also be linked into the SCDNR website as well. Ms. Holling is unsure but is willing to contact someone. Ms. Lognion suggested expanding on the pesticide cost and

acknowledging how reducing pesticide use in public water systems is important. Ms. Moorer agreed. There were no other questions, comments, or concerns. Ms. Lognion made the motion to approve the draft plan as amended, and Mr. Altman seconded the motion. No additional discussion at this time. Ms. Holling called for the motion to a vote. The motion passed unanimously.

8. Bylaws Discussion

Ms. Holling called to correct bylaws, correcting the location of the principal office from the SCDNR building to the SCDES main office, and removing the numbers in the parentheses. There were no questions or concerns. Mr. Simmons made the motion to approve the changes, seconded by Ms. Moorer. The vote passed unanimously.

9. Future Council Meetings

Ms. Holling stated that she will send out a poll for when and where the next meeting will occur.

10. New Business

Ms. Holling called for any new business. There was no new business.

11. Adjournment

Ms. Lognion made the motion to adjourn, Mr. Stout seconded. Ms. Holling called the motion to a vote and the vote was unanimous. The meeting adjourned at 11:54am.