

Aquatic weeds in Lake Gaston - Part II

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Editor

In Part I, (see April 7, 2004 Lake Gaston Gazette, page 12), we discussed the various aquatic weeds in our lake, where they came from, and provided some information on the effects of proliferation on our lake.

This week we will take a look back at the spread of aquatic weeds over the last several years, and the efforts to control them. Our thanks to Dr. David Demont, [retired] from N.C. Division of Water Resources, who documented the data up to 1996, and to Les Moccock, a member of the Weed Control Council and former chairman of the Lake Gaston Association Weed Committee, without whose help these articles would not have been possible.

1963 – Lake Gaston, a 20,300 surface acre lake, is constructed by VEPCO (now Dominion Generation) as a source of water for hydroelectric generation.

1982 – Several property owners in the south eastern part of the lake spot a nuisance weed growing along patches of shoreline. The weed is identified as Brazilian Elodea.

1983-85 – Following aerial & boat surveys by VEPCO they, with some assistance from Dr. Demont and Dr. Stratford Kay of NCSU, conduct pilot herbicide treatments to try and contain the rapidly spreading weed.

1985-86 – With VEPCO's support, the five Counties bordering the lake, form the Lake Gaston Weed Control Council (LGWCC), which was incorporated under the statutes of North Carolina on Aug. 26, 1985. The purpose of its formation is to promote research, control and/or eradication of undesirable aquatic weeds in Lake Gaston.

The Council is provided "Full Control & Authority" in both States to carry out these purposes. The Council consists of 15 directors, three appointed by each County.

Recognizing the potential economic, environmental and recreational impact of extensive weed infestation, each County begins making a yearly contribution to the Council of \$3,000 each. Despite continued treatments, Elodea continues to spread.

1987-88 – Advice from experts around the Country elicit the strong suggestion that Elodea is, because of its shallow root system, susceptible to freezing temperatures. With assistance from the Army Corps of Engineers, the Council is able to persuade VEPCO to draw the lake water level down by nine feet during the winter of 1987/88, and with the aid of several hard frosts this effort was successful in controlling the elodea, which had by then infested nearly 500 acres, mainly in Myrick, Hamlin and Sledge creeks.

1989 – In a report to LGWCC, Dr. Stratford Kay, NCSU, identifies approximately 25 acres of hydrilla in Lake Gaston, in small areas along the shores in the northwestern end of the lake. Kay's research indicates that this weed is much worse than Elodea, in that it is not affected by frost. He also reports that it can grow in water up to at least 10 feet deep, and estimates that the lake has at least 3,800 acres with that depth.

1990-91 – Numerous complaints are received from property owners about hydrilla. The weed is estimated to be now infesting about 100 acres of shoreline. The Weed Control Council hired a licensed applicator from South Carolina (at that time none were available in N.C.) to treat most of the Hydrilla. Control was effective, but new infestations covered almost 560 acres.

Next week, Part III will continue the history of the spread and treatment of aquatic weeds in Lake Gaston.

