

## Aquatic weeds in Lake Gaston - Part IV

2003 – Early in the year, as a result of meetings with the Lake Gaston Association (LGA), Dr. Brown met with officials of Dominion Generation to request their assistance by increasing treatment funding, and/or providing a vehicle to assess and collect a fee from all Lake property owners. The Lake Gaston Association (LGA) also separately petitioned each county around the Lake for financial and/or other assistance to eradicate the weed, based on the very real negative impact continued weed growth would have upon lake property values, recreation, and especially tourism.

The treatment plan approved by the Weed Control Council for 2003 targeted 1175.4 acres for fluridone applications in the following areas:

Development / Area	Acres
Song Bird	50
Little Stonehouse Crk	61.5
Pretty Creek	37
Peahill Creek	260
Poplar Creek	193
Lizard Creek	150
Sludge Creek	10.5
Dogwood Branch	52
Woodland Hurst	21
Hubquarter	133.4
Lyons Creek	59
Poe Creek	42
Pigeon Roost	72
Mill Creek	34
Total Acreage	1175.4

In May of 2003, Dr. Elton Brown, President of the Weed Council, announced that he had reached an agreement with both North Carolina and Virginia Wildlife organizations to re-introduce grass carp in the lake at a rate of eight fish per acre, the total number to be based upon the fall 2003 survey. No new grass carp had been introduced into the lake since 1998.

Aquatic Nuisance Plant Control (ANPC) developed their treatment plan based upon this information, and concentrated their fluridone treatment in the upper ends of coves and creeks with a goal of forcing the grass carp to concentrate more in the mouths of creeks and on the main lake.

In October of 2003, the Weed Control Council, ANPC, Dominion Generation, and the LGA jointly sponsored a Pig Picking and invited local and state-level politicians from both North Carolina and Virginia. During the event, these dignitaries were provided with boat rides to the western end of Lake Gaston to view first hand the extent of the aquatic weed problem and to highlight the need for additional funding.

Between Oct. 24 and Nov. 6, 2003, 25,392 grass carp were put in the lake, the number based upon a survey conducted by Dominion Generation that showed 3,162 infested acres.

In November of 2003, during a Weed Council Meeting, ANPC presented satellite imagery that demonstrated the effectiveness of the 2003 fluridone treatments. Because of strategic placement of the fluridone and currents, ANPC's targeted treatment of 1,175 acres actually produced an effective control area of over 2,500 acres, according to their manager.

During the same meeting, ANPC asked for \$799,800 in 2004 to carry out public fluridone treatment of about 1,200 acres of hydrilla. The increase, according to ANPC, was due to the skyrocketing cost of fluridone.

Weed Council Treasurer John Slaton told attendees that the total budget requirement for 2004 would probably reach \$887,000 with the inclusion of \$79,350 for grass carp, \$2,000 for administrative expenses, and about \$5,000 for reserve. A joint committee between the Weed Council and the LGA was established to suggest plans to raise an approximate \$356,000 shortfall.

2004 - Using the impetus provided by the October 2003 Pig Picking, the Weed Council and the LGA pushed Virginia legislators to include \$200,000 for weed treatment in the state's 2004/2005 budget. Property owners were asked to join in the push. As a result, both the State Senate and the House of Representatives submitted budget amendments to include the funding. Unfortunately, that money did not survive the budget process.

Simultaneously, the Weed Council requested increased funding to \$40,000 from each of the five counties surrounding the lake. Those requests are currently being considered in the 2004/2005 budget process.

Additionally, it was decided to begin a process to establish Watershed Improvement Districts in each county, beginning with Northampton County. These districts would have the authority to tax waterfront property owners to raise money for hydrilla treatment. That process is ongoing as well.

The Weed Control Council and the LGA will continue to examine other long term funding solutions as the cost of treatment increases. A projected need of approximately 1.7 million per year over the next five to seven years is thought to be sufficient to bring the noxious weeds under control, after which the Weed Control Council seems to think they can keep the weeds in check with approximately \$500,000 per year.

Determining Treatment Areas - In April, ANPC completes a comprehensive survey to determine noxious weed growth in the lake. They then make recommendations to the Weed Control Council based on the following criteria:

- (1) Where herbicide will be most effective.
- (2) Where it will be most beneficial to the lake.
- (3) Where herbicide will be most cost effective.
- (4) How an area fits into the long term management plan.

Secondary factors are also taken into consideration such as how they can use treatment areas to benefit the most homeowners, control where grass carp populate (areas where herbicides are not effective), as well as minimizing the spread of invasive weeds to other areas.

The treatment plan is developed and presented to the Weed Control Council who then makes the final decision based upon available funds.

Over the course of the last four articles on weeds, it is hoped that our readers have gained a better perspective on the weed control problem and the efforts that have been made over the years to address the situation. The battle continues.