

Summary of Public Comments, Responses, and Plan Modifications to the Draft 2007 South Carolina Aquatic Plant Management Plan

Santee Cooper Lakes:

Commenters: Hunter Suggs, Rep. Phillip Lowe

Comments:

1. "I am in complete opposition to releasing any additional carp into the Santee cooper Lakes. Ever since the original stocking occurred, ALL of the native and non-native grasses and vegetation disappeared, and the Upper End of Lake Marion has become a mud hole. The ducks that used to winter in this area do not visit "The Swamp" anymore. Please do not release any additional carp into the Santee Cooper Lake System." (Suggs)

2. "Aquatics do not currently pose a problem. Your previous overstocking hurt waterfowling and fishing. You have proved you can stock enough to control vegetation. The vegetation you state has recovered is not hydrilla. Let more vegetation return. Do not restock yet!!!" (Lowe)

Response:

The original grass carp stocking between 1989 and 1996 added over 760,000 sterile grass carp to Lakes Marion and Moultrie. That amount was needed to control the 48,000 acres of hydrilla that was present at the time. That multi-year stocking was successful, but after hydrilla was controlled the fish also impacted desirable native vegetation. That was ten years ago and since then the number of grass carp have declined to about 5,800 fish and beneficial vegetation has come back. Native vegetation has shown a 60% increase in acreage from 2005 to 2006 for a total of 12,960 vegetated acres. Total vegetative coverage now is conservatively estimated at 9.3 % in Lake Marion and 6.2% in Lake Moultrie based on annual aerial surveys and photography. Some hydrilla is beginning to return in the main lakes. To avoid the occurrence of widespread hydrilla infestations again in the Santee Cooper Lakes, a small maintenance stocking of sterile grass carp is needed. The maintenance stocking plan calls for adding a small number of grass carp to the system to equal the number present at the beginning of 2006 when hydrilla was under control yet native species were present (8,200 fish). That additional number is 2,100 fish in Lake Marion and 520 in Lake Moultrie. This is a very small number of grass carp for a lake system that is over 170,000 acres in size and about one percent of the original stocking. The proposed stocking plan was reviewed and approved by DNR fisheries and waterfowl biologists to help ensure the protection of fish and wildlife populations. In addition to the maintenance stocking; the plan calls for efforts to increase habitat by promoting vegetation beneficial to wildlife and waterfowl through other habitat enhancement projects. Those efforts include the planting of desirable native plant species, improvements to the current WMAs, and additional support for the Santee National Wildlife Refuge.

Plan Modifications:

None at present.

East Branch of the Cooper River:

Commenters: Tommy Kellum

Comments:

1. “My concern is the East Branch of the Cooper River and the adjoining rice fields and French Quarter, Quemby, and Huger Creeks. I reviewed your Management Plan Draft and it stated that the coverage was approximately 3000 acres. If this is referring to weed coverage it is highly under estimated. I live on French Quarter Creek and I see air boats spraying approximately every other year. The weeds are closing off virtually all adjoining creeks and rice fields. It appears that after the weeds gain control then silt fills the creeks even further. Your draft mentions the use of carp in the Santee cooper lakes as one method of control. What other options are there for the creeks besides spraying? If there is none, what would be the effects of spraying more often? Recreational use is on the rise and our useable water area has greatly been reduced over the past ten years.” (Kellum)

Response:

The main aquatic weed problem in the creeks you refer to is the growth of water primrose and water hyacinth. Neither of these plants can be controlled by grass carp. Other biological controls are available for water hyacinth but have not been successful in this part of the country. So there aren't many options for the creeks along the Cooper River except for herbicide application. In trying to manage a complete system, one must start small by treating the main channels and creeks most used by the public. After a certain level of control is established then efforts can expand to include the smaller creeks. Timing, water levels, and available funding play a crucial part in all control efforts. Additional herbicide treatments are possible if additional federal, state or local funding were available. We are committed to a systematic approach where control efforts are focused on the areas of greatest public use first then expanded into adjoining creeks where public use is less.

Plan Modifications:

None at present.