

LAKE CONROE ADVISORY PANEL

Minutes (Draft)

Wednesday, October 26, 2005

The first meeting of the Lake Conroe Advisory Panel (LCAP) was held Wednesday, October 26, 2005, 3:00 pm in the conference room of the San Jacinto River Authority (SJRA) Conroe, TX.

Blake Kellum, SJRA Lake Conroe Division Manager, stated that attendees were appointed by SJRA to assist in communicating the contents of the draft of the SJRA Hydrilla Management Plan to the community and to provide the SJRA with input on this issue. The meeting was moderated by Dawn M. Cleboski, General Manager of the Bentwater® Property Owners Association. An agenda and meeting conduct guidelines were distributed.

In attendance were representatives of various area property owner organizations, fishing associations and businesses as well as staff members of SJRA and Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD). Please see attached contact information furnished by SJRA.

LCAP Members

Butz, Tom and Nancy
Cleboski, Dawn
Cook, Tim
Getz, Marty
Henderson, Don
Joseph, John
LeBourgeois, Tom
McCasland, Rod
Parten, Ed
Richardson, Ben
Uzelmeier, Chris
Wagner, John
Werner, Ron
Wheatley, Sue

TPWD Staff

Chilton, Earl, Dr.
Webb, Mark

SJRA Staff

Adams, Jim
Beckum, Dustin
Foster, Brian
Kellum, Blake

A detailed presentation of the plan was conducted by Dr. Earl Chilton, Director of Habitat Enhancement, TPWD. At the end of the presentation, the Question and Answer session rendered the following:

Q. (Werner) Why not treat only with hydrilla flies?

A. That is not a widespread enough solution. The flies did not spread in similar situations. Lake Conroe too large.

Q. (Parten) What survey has been done to see how many carp that are still left in Lake Conroe?

A. Typical surveys. No carp found in recent studies. Hard to track without radio equipment. It has been reported that some persons fishing have seen them.

Q. (Wagner) Will there be metrics to go with the plan?

A. Not planned at this time.

Q. (Parten) When will the dam repairs be completed?

A. Unknown at this time, probably spring. Have unilateral draw-down now and want to take advantage.

- Q. (Parten) How much hydrilla killed from the draw-down to date?
A. None. Sometimes draw-downs stimulate hydrilla growth. Desiccation kills the mass.
- Q. (Uzelmeier) What are the expectation for herbicides? Why does TPWD think they work?
A. They have worked for 8 years. Aquathol will kill hydrilla within a week or two.
- Q. (Werner) Is the plan 5 carp per acre?
A. Yes, per vegetated acre.
- Q. (Werner) How long does it take for one carp to eat one acre?
A. There are too many variables to be able to answer that question.
- Q. (Wheatley) Do triploid carp eat one-third less than diploid carp? Cited stats on other states recommendations. If we are putting in minimum number of fish and they eat less and we lose x number of fish per year and only 10% live nine years and have lower growth rate, are we running risk of putting in too few?
A. Answer not documented.
- Q. (Wheatley) What will be the size of the fish?
A. Minimum 12".
- Q. (Uzelmeier) Do you have any stats on the success of counting carp?
A. No. Research has been minimal.
- Q. (Richardson) Would you be willing to replace the carp that died off when in containers?
A. If the carp died quickly, you could go back to the vendor for replacement.
- Q. (Parten) Is the general public or community aware of the fishing associations policies on native vegetation?
A. There is 3-4% hydrilla in the lake. It took 9 years to get here. Native vegetation helps prevent erosion and promotes good fishing. Bushy pond weed is primarily in front of boat docks. To prevent vegetation in front of boat docks, can use plastic layers, weed rollers or herbicides. Property owners can apply for herbicide permit.
- Q. (Butz) If fish are put in the lake, when will they be put in and who pays for them?
A. TPWD has no funds. There is a \$2 per fish admin fee payable to TPWD that will be paid by SJRA. The private sector may wish to pay for the fish. They are \$12-20 each, and possibly could be discounted to \$6 if purchased in bulk from Arkansas vendors. They could be put in during spring, 2006.
- Q. (Werner) How much will a harvester from Australia cost?
A. \$250,000. They will go 17'-19' deep and cut 8-10 acres daily.
- Q. How does the harvester work when there are stumps?
A. It doesn't look like they have any stumps in Australia, so we do not know.
- Q. (Parten) Is TPWD familiar with Lake Guntersville project?
A. They are cutting 5-6 acres per date. The Tennessee Valley Authority has had good results.
- Q. (Parten) What is depth of native vegetations?
A. 8'-10'
- Q. (Wheatley) Was all the hydrilla eradicated in Lake Guntersville?
A. (By Parten) It was controlled, not eradicated.
- Q. (Cook) How detailed are the surveys?
A. (By Mark Webb) One time every 4 years, a complete survey is done on Lake Conroe. Electro fishing survey being done now with 24 random stations.

Notes taken by J. Joseph:

-The plan for Lake Conroe was modeled after plan on Lake Austin. -Lake Austin growing big bass before hydrilla infestation.

-Proposed Time Line:

1. Conduct survey of lake...done this past summer...868 acres of "weed"

2. Sept-Nov -05 Continue herbicide treatment
 - Apply for grass carp permit - Public input - Prepare for radio tracking.
 - Previous vegetation controlled for 6-7 years with grass carp
 3. Dec 05-May-06 Gather public input and if feasible, stock the 5/acre
 - Evaluate with radio tracking
- Carp will stay in same area for long periods after getting acclimated to area and the food.
 - Lake Conroe currently has 1476 Ac. of native vegetation.
 - Hydrilla is preferred food for grass carp.
 - Where feasible, mechanical harvesting of hydrilla will be done. New machine from Australia will work up to 17-19 feet depth.
- May '06 - Conduct lake wide survey of all aquatic plants...and determine if more grass carp are needed
 - Sep. '06 Conduct lake wide survey for another evaluation of plants and determine necessity for more grass carp
 - An option is to stock hydrilla flies in selected areas of lake and monitor growth to evaluate effectiveness. It worked on parts of the Rio Grand below Falcon dam. Lake Conroe probably not suitable situation for use of flies. Hydrilla flies stay in a very small area.
 - What metrics to measure progress? None specifically.
 - Lake Austin had a drawdown for 5 consecutive years. This is probably not feasible for Lake Conroe. Lake Conroe should fill next fall.
 - Discussion on Aquathol and Sonar and the pluses and minuses of each. Aquathol only kills to lake bottom, not roots.
 - In North Carolina and Florida they used 20 fish/acre.
 - 5 fish per vegetated acre is on the low end of application done to other lakes.
 - Triploids eat approx 10% less than others.
 - Stocking size recommended to be 12 inches. for Lake Conroe
 - Fencing of the fish is not a proven method. It is new research.
 - Clifton said that native vegetation is good, provides clear water, stops erosion. We have 3-4% coverage of hydrilla now.
- Most people are seeing bushy pond weed around their docks and not hydrilla. Recommend putting down bottom barriers for control. The native weeds come and go depending on conditions.
 - Fisheries tests done every 4 years, complete survey...using gill net, checking w/fishermen, electro survey.
 - Mortality rate approx 1800 fish killed per acre, mostly blue gills and sunfish, in previous electro surveys.
 - Aquathol - kills to the soil base only. Per Blake Kellum - unsatisfactory results - spotty and sporadic this summer. Solid (undiluted?) Aquathol is best and has been used in Harbor Town.

It was determined that the next meeting of the LCAP will take place on Wednesday, November 2nd, 3:00pm, in the conference room of SJRA. Members of the LCAP were charged with the responsibility of securing any questions or comments from their groups and presenting them in writing to the SJRA as soon as possible. It was discussed that the duties of the moderator, who will remain neutral during the meeting, will be passed among this group. The moderator for the November 2nd meeting has not yet been determined. A vote to restrict membership in LCAP to the original attendees carried unanimously although a substitute may be appointed if a member is unable to attend a meeting.