

## Kissimmee Interagency Meeting – Aquatic Plant Management

September 17, 2008

In attendance:

Ed Harris – FFWCC  
Mike Sowinski – FFWCC  
Bob Yuskaitis – Cypress Shores  
Gerald Adrian – UPI  
Sarah Berger – Osceola County  
Stephanie Walters – ProSource One  
Paul Gray – Florida Audubon  
Erica VanHorn – FFWCC  
Mike Netherland – USACE  
Mike Bodle – SFWMD  
Ryan Moore – ReMetrix  
Tim Coughlin – FFWCC

Rick Clark – FFWCC  
Beacham Furse – FFWCC  
Alex Kropp – FFWCC  
Dharmen Setaram – UPI  
Sherry Burroughs – Osceola County  
Sandra Sneckenberger – USFWS  
Kelle Sullivan – FFWCC  
Danielle Schobl – FFWCC  
Jeremy Slade – UF  
Keshav Setaram – SFWMD  
Chuck Seacrist - SePro  
Eleanor Foerste – UF/IFAS

The meeting began with attendees introducing themselves. Keshav Setaram gave an update on current management of floating plants. Weather events related to tropical storm Fay and hurricane Ike have kept the crews off the lakes. Consequently, hyacinths and lettuce are expanding in some areas. Crews will be on Lake Runnymede tomorrow and Lake Kissimmee for several days after that. 20 acres of hydrilla was recently treated in Lake Toho at Whaley's Landing. There are additional hydrilla treatments to be conducted in the next few weeks on Lake Toho at South Steer Beach and Brown's Point. Also, crews have completed control operations on West Indian marsh grass in the Dead River between Lakes Cypress and Hatchineha.

Mike Bodle gave an update about the expansion of Scleria lacustris in Lake Cypress and the surrounding marshes. SFWMD staff had created a map showing current locations of Scleria and West Indian marsh grass in these areas. SFWMD spray crews have been working to control the marsh grass in recent months and have been able to access new populations due to high water levels.

Chuck Seacrist and Ryan Moore gave an update on the penoxsulam applications that were made in Lakes Cypress and Jackson. The Lake Cypress treatment began in early 2008 and turned out to be more complex than originally anticipated due to high water levels and increased flow. However, the overall results were very good. The hydrilla biomass and biocover in the lake were reduced by nearly 70 percent. Monitoring of non-target plants revealed short-term impacts on pickerelweed but no impacts to other submerged or emergent plants. Monitoring on Lake Cypress will continue through April, 2009. The Lake Jackson treatment began in late 2007 and was also successful in reducing hydrilla biomass and biocover. However, the hydrilla in Lake Jackson has

already started to recover and expand. Several access trails were recently opened up with aerial applications of Aquathol K. Water hyacinths and water lettuce, as well as Salvinia and Azolla, were also completely controlled in these lakes while penoxsulam was present.

Sandra Sneckenberger discussed the guidelines for managing aquatic vegetation in lakes where snail kites are present. A smaller group has been working on this document since early summer and a final version is nearing completion. Many of those at the meeting had already seen and commented on the most recent draft and Sandra gave copies to those who had not. There was discussion about the reasons for creating the guidelines, the additional work and coordination that will be required in order to implement them, and the anticipated benefits that will be seen – both for snail kites and lake managers. The broadest goal of these guidelines is the creation of timeframes for planning and implementing large-scale hydrilla treatments, floating plant treatments, and other activities designed to enhance snail kite and apple snail habitat. A copy of the final guidelines will be made available to everyone after Sandra has incorporated the suggested edits that were discussed and agreed to today. Everyone expressed appreciation for the hard work and cooperation that went into creating this document.

As part of the snail kite discussion, there were questions raised about methods for disseminating this document, as well as other information related to aquatic plant management or the Kissimmee chain of lakes. Alex Kropp offered to contact FWC IT staff in Tallahassee to see if it was possible to create a web-based sharepoint that could be used to host information and would be accessible by the public. Mike Bodle indicated that SFWMD might be able to provide something similar. Both of them will look into different options and we will decide the most reasonable course of action ASAP. It was also suggested that a press release be prepared that included information about the new guidelines and the coordination between lake managers, regulatory agencies, and other stakeholders. Mike Bodle offered to contact Bill Graf (SFWMD) to initiate that process.

There was additional discussion about the needs for augmenting snail kite habitat on Lake Toho as well as in the water conservation areas of south Florida. FWC teams, along with others, are investigating the methods of creating and enhancing habitat and fine-tuning water level regulation in these areas. Money is available through the FWC Invasive Plant Management Section to fund additional research with UF and UWF teams as well as new projects from other institutions.

There was discussion about the chain of communication between spray crews and those that make the management decisions related to snail kites. Field crews will be outfitted with GPS receivers and will receive regular updates of kite nesting. They are already aware of the buffer zones and will be able to monitor their locations relative to known kite nests. If there are invasive plant problems near known nests, field crews will contact Ed Harris (Toho and Kissimmee) or Erica Van Horn (Istokpoga) to document the infestations and will not conduct any treatments until FWC managers have conferred with USFWS staff. Because it is anticipated that floating plant management will be conducted

year-round, this situation should only occur when water hyacinths or water lettuce are threatening existing nests.

Ed Harris then identified areas of Lake Toho with hydrilla populations that would probably require treatment prior to February, 2009. Treatment plans will have to be finalized by the FWC standing team in the next few weeks but there was discussion about the overall concept of hydrilla treatments to be proposed. Sandra Sneckenberger and Paul Gray agreed that treatments prior to mid-January should pose no issues for kites or snails. Once the treatment plans are fine-tuned, a smaller group can adjust the boundaries and herbicide rates based on the agreements reached today. There is close to 13,000 acres of hydrilla in Lake Toho as of this date. Hydrilla treatments will probably total less than 50 percent of this acreage. In addition to the previous discussion of the impacts from penoxsulam, there was additional discussion about potential impacts to non-target vegetation from endothall as well as the impacts to submerged native plants from unmanaged hydrilla.

The majority of the littoral zone of the lake is filled with hydrilla, much of it at the surface. Portions could be left temporarily untreated, however, unless there are immediate concerns of eelgrass and pondweed being smothered by hydrilla. Tim Coughlin and Ed Harris both have maps of these areas and will better define the potential treatment boundaries. Much of Big Grassy Island can possibly be left untreated – there isn't any boat traffic to speak of and there are relatively small amounts of eelgrass. The greatest concentration of eelgrass can be found along the western shoreline of the large open water areas, the northern shoreline of Goblet's Cove, and the South Steer Beach area. The open water areas of the southern lobe that were treated in April, 2008, have significant hydrilla regrowth that has not yet reached the surface. There is also a great deal of topped-out hydrilla waterward of the littoral zone. Treatment of this area should mirror the most recent treatment in order to maintain flood control through the S-61 water control structure.

The main body of the lake is showing tremendous regrowth after the April treatment. Much of the treated area and the open water adjacent to the littoral zone has heavy hydrilla coverage; hydrilla has reached the surface in the northern reaches of this zone. Goblet's Cove is nearly covered with topped out hydrilla. The option of applying liquid endothall through a drip application in the C-31 canal still seems to be the best option. Mike Netherland, Jeremy Slade, Sarah Berger, and Dharmen Setaram are collaborating on a treatment method that will control hydrilla in the canal and in Goblet's Cove west of the mouth of the C-31 canal.

The areas south and west of Makinson Island have dense hydrilla coverage and should be treated as fully as possible. North of Makinson Island, however, the hydrilla coverage is less dense and large treatments can probably be avoided during the next 6 to 8 months. The exceptions are Cypress Cove, Scotty's Cove, and the 400+ acres north of Little Grassy Island. These three zones have dense hydrilla coverage and should be treated fully. Applications of endothall are recommended north of Little Grassy Island. It may be possible to use combinations of endothall and penoxsulam in the 2 coves; they are

more contained and it would be much easier to maintain herbicide concentrations in these areas. Ed Harris, Mike Netherland, David Tarver, and Chuck Seacrist will look at these areas and devise an appropriate treatment protocol.

The hydrilla in Lake Cypress is covering much the same area as it has for the past 3 years. The center portion of the lake has hydrilla at about 30 percent bottom coverage but the remainder of the lake is almost completely covered with new hydrilla growth. Treatments will mirror the last endothall treatments – large areas in the south and west portions of the lake will be treated to maintain flood control and navigation and access trails will be cut from the public boat ramp and the C-34 canal. Additional areas surrounding eelgrass will also be targeted to keep the hydrilla from smothering those plants.

Danielle Schobl gave updates on the hydrilla in Lakes Hatchineha and Kissimmee. Lake Hatchineha has very little hydrilla outside of the eastern lobe. The eastern lobe should be treated to maintain access and flood protection. There are several other smaller areas that can be treated, including a zone at the northern end of C-37. Hydrilla in Lake Kissimmee has been greatly reduced and is now limited to the northeastern cove, which has nearly 1000 acres of hydrilla, and the southern end of the lake, which has several hundred acres of hydrilla. Snail kites have not historically nested in these areas so management activities should not be a concern.

Danielle Schobl will provide more detailed maps of these areas in the next few months in order to plan the treatments. Because of the kite presence on Toho, those areas will be treated first in order to have all major work completed prior to the commencement of nesting season. After that, management work will begin on Cypress, Hatchineha, and Kissimmee.

Erica Van Horn gave an update on hydrilla in Lake Istokpoga and showed the hydrilla infestations in relation to historic kite nesting areas. There is a Lake Istokpoga interagency group, as well as an FWC standing team, that is going through the same process as this interagency group to integrate invasive plant management with snail kite conservation.

It was agreed that another meeting of the full interagency group was not needed until after January 1, 2009. A meeting notice will be sent out once a site has been secured.