Florida Invasive Plant Management Report - October 2011

Despite aggressive control efforts, *Salvinia molesta* still persists in Florida - Giant salvinia still infests (or likely infests) four different waterways located in Florida – Pensacola, near Tallahassee, Ocala, and in Collier County. Surveillance of these infested systems is ongoing, along with aggressive treatment efforts. Lake Laurie, a six acre small lake located just north of Tallahassee (photo left), had an initial giant salvinia infestation discovered in 2007 and was immediately treated with herbicides. Since then, the lake has required spot treatments to remove small infestations of giant salvinia three times a year. The suspected pathway of introduction of giant salvinia into this lake is via a contaminated boat and trailer from Louisiana.

Crested floating heart (*Nymphoides cristata*) becoming more widespread in Florida's waterways – Although this Asian species has increased in frequency in Florida's lakes, ponds, and canals, it still has not significantly altered Florida's native aquatic plant communities. However, under certain conditions, the species can produce a dense canopy, especially in canals. Crested floating heart is being controlled when it is found in public waterways.

Status of Invasive Plant Management Funding in Florida – State funding for controlling invasive plant species in public conservation lands and waterways has decreased by 35% since 2008. These funding cuts have resulted in significant impacts to controlling new and existing invasive plant populations on Florida's conservation lands and in invasive plant management research.

FWC hydrilla management position statement- FWC recently established an agency position statement and overall guidelines on how the agency will implement management of this species in Florida's public waterways:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Position on Hydrilla Management in Florida

PURPOSE FOR THE AGENCY POSITION

The purpose is to establish an agency position and guidance on how the nonindigenous invasive aquatic plant *Hydrilla verticillata* (hydrilla) should be managed and what process will be employed to determine how hydrilla will be managed in a specific waterbody. The management objectives for hydrilla have for many years been a point of disagreement and contention between the many different user groups and managers of the State's freshwater lakes and rivers. Prior to July 1, 2008 the invasive plant management program was under the direction of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the statutory mandate was to manage nonindigenous aquatic plants in a coordinated manner on a continuous basis in order to maintain the target plant population at the lowest feasible level as determined by DEP. The Legislature moved the invasive plant management program from DEP to the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) in July of 2008.

I. AGENCY POSITION

It is the position of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) that native aquatic plant communities provide ecological functions that support diverse native fish and wildlife communities in Florida waterbodies. FWC considers hydrilla to be an invasive, non-native aquatic plant that can, at high densities, adversely impact native plant abundance, sportfish growth, recreational use, flood control, and dissolved oxygen. Once established, hydrilla has proven difficult if not impossible to eradicate with current technology and is expensive to manage. Therefore, FWC opposes the deliberate introduction of hydrilla into waterbodies where it is not currently present. FWC prefers to manage for native aquatic plants, but recognizes that in waterbodies where native submersed aquatic plants are absent or limited, hydrilla at low to moderate densities can be beneficial to fish and wildlife. FWC will manage hydrilla on a waterbody by waterbody basis using a risk-based approach to determine the level of management.

In waterbodies where hydrilla is well established, it will be managed at levels that are commensurate with the primary uses and functions of the waterbody and fish and wildlife. FWC will determine the level of hydrilla management on each public waterbody using a risk-based analysis that considers human safety issues, economic concerns, budgetary constraints, fish and wildlife values, and recreational use, with input from resource management partners and local stakeholders. Factors such as available control technology (e.g. herbicides), current waterbody condition, and activities occurring within the watershed will also influence the timing and level of hydrilla management. For additional information visit: http://myfwc.com/media/1386747/Hydrilla-Mgmt-Position-Background-Information.pdf

II. IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

The following outline is the procedure staff will utilize to determine how to manage hydrilla in a specific waterbody:

1. Contact External Stakeholders and request input on their desired future condition of the waterbody:

a. Who to contact

i. User groups
ii. Water management districts
iii. Other (Federal, State, County government organizations, and/or other local stakeholders who show an interest in management of the waterbody)
iv. Non-governmental organizations
v. Cooperators/Contractors

2. Invasive Plant Management Section biologist:

a. Annually survey each public waterbody for presence/absence of aquatic plant species noting the estimated acreage of invasive non-native plants.

b. Determine primary uses of each waterbody where hydrilla is proposed to be managed by working through tiered water use considerations, with tier levels based on community priority considerations, and determine what applies to each respective waterbody.

i. Tier One Considerations (not listed in priority order):

1) Flood Control
2) Hydropower
3) Irrigation
4) Listed Species
5) Navigation
6) Potable Waters

ii. Tier Two Considerations (not listed in priority order):

1) Angling
2) Waterfowl
3) Fish and wildlife habitat
4) Recreation
5) Technological and economic (positive and negative economic considerations)

c. Draft/outline hydrilla management activities that may need to occur within that fiscal year (July 1 – June 30) taking into account tier one and tier two considerations.

3. Contact Internal Stakeholders and request input.

a. Provide proposed hydrilla management activities and list of identified tier one and tier two considerations, by waterbody, to internal stakeholders including:

i. Regional Fisheries Biologist
ii. Regional Species Conservation Biologist
iii. Regional Aquatic Habitat Restoration & Enhancement Subsection Biologist
iv. Hunting & Game Management Waterfowl Biologist
v. Regional Alligator Biologist
vi. Office of Recreation Services
vii. Other concerned internal staff
viii. If teams or working groups are already established, ensure that representatives of the above listed stakeholders are allowed the opportunity to provide input

b. Compile comments from concerned internal stakeholders.

c. Plan group site visit, if necessary.

4. Refine the planned hydrilla management activities as necessary.

5. Hold public meetings, where necessary.

6. Adaptively manage based on current conditions.

a. Notify internal and external stakeholders of any management changes that may occur
b. Notify internal Public Information Staff of large-scale management activities
c. Notify Law Enforcement of scheduled large-scale management activities

7. Evaluate success