

Role Of The Florida Federation Of Women's (Junior) Clubs In Aquatic Weed Control

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The recent interest shown in the projected role of the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs, particularly that of the Junior Clubs, in aquatic weed control in the State of Florida could touch every public agency, industry and private company represented in the Hyacinth Control Society.

You will not be alone in receiving the attention of this statewide project. All ready, local, state and national administrators and legislators have been contacted; signifying that this group of over 4,500 young women are rapidly becoming aware that all is not well with Florida's inland waterways, and that corrective steps are needed now, not later.

The majority of these officials realize that standing behind this group in our appeals for help, evaluation, and action is a reserve force of 27,000 senior members of the Florida Federation. Some of whom are already adding their voices to the challenge.

For a project to gain statewide acceptance, it must begin in a local club, be introduced by reports or appeals for assistance to the State Chairman, under whose category it fits, and be of value to other areas of the State. The aquatic weed control project started by the Temple Terrace Juniors in 1965 met these standards.

While by no means, the first group of citizens in our state to become interested in finding a solution to a local waterweed infestation, this service club had the distinct advantage of its membership in a state and national organization that stressed community leadership.

The first year in which the Temple Terrace Juniors worked to obtain control measures for the "elodea" (*Hydrilla verticillata*) within the Hillsborough River was primarily an educational period.

They learned many things, the identity of the weed, the difficulty in obtaining material written for laymen on the subject, the suspicion that is cast upon a woman's interest in the field of water management, and that some local public officials become very difficult to contact when they are short of both money for and knowledge of a given subject. One of the most helpful individuals we met during this period was Mr. Stanley Abramson, of Southern Mill Creek Products. His advise and patience were indeed an encouragement.

Both local apathy on the part of the general public, apparently based on the old premise of what you can't see, won't hurt you and a statement on the part of a county commissioner that he had two manatee placed in the river to automatically eliminate the problem, meant that we had to table our efforts for nearly a year. (As a side note, the manatee were nonexistent.)

The temporary ceasing of spraying of the water hyacinths, (*Eichhornia crassipes*) with 2,4-dichlorophenoxy acetic acid (2,4-D) due to the question of safe tolerances in a potable water supply rapidly created public interest in the river. We had hyacinths by the thousands of acres.

The local Chamber of Commerce requested that the Juniors reactivate their project and joined us by forming a committee made up of representatives of both organizations. The City Engineer joined this committee and our meetings were also attended by the City Manager and Councilmen. Direct city action was impossible, for while our small suburban community has the river to three sides as boundaries, it has no authority over any phase of the water management. Mr. James Gorman, in his role of Mosquito Control Director for Hillsborough County, discussed the hazards presented by the hyacinths and concurred with our prior evaluation that these were only temporary and that the "elodea" was the major menace present in the river. His recommendations brought us into contact with Robert Blackburn of the United States Department of Agriculture, Crop Research Station.

The chairman of this committee was soon appointed aquatic weed control representative for the city and the city sponsored her membership in the Hyacinth Control Society.

It was soon realized that help could only come from research, a financial and technical burden that could not be handled by our area, the water management district or perhaps even the State. To draw attention to this need the Juniors carried the primary role in State and National contacts and the Chamber committee worked on local levels for support.

The State Director of the Junior Clubs in the Florida Federation gave permission for the Temple Terrace Juniors to prepare aquatic weed informational tracts containing suggested steps for action to be distributed to each Junior club in the State at the Fall Board Meeting in September, 1967. Word was then received that the material should be prepared for both levels, so four hundred copies were distributed to all club presidents, district directors and division chairmen. It was noted that we could only expect limited response as all other suggested state projects had been adopted for a two year basis the year before and a majority of the clubs were involved in a full range of activities and were unable to assume another project.

The steps recommended to the Federation clubs are of direct interest to the Hyacinth Control Society. They are as follows:

Step One. Write to your congressional delegation in Washington, Senators and Representatives, requesting that funds budgeted to the U. S. Army Corp of Engineers for weed control research be increased and the increased allocation to the U. S. Department of Agriculture Crop Research Station in Florida be broadened to cover research into control of "elodea," eurasian milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) and other noxious aquatic weeds, as well as, water hyacinths in potable water and our state's other waterways. Stress that this is a statewide problem shared with us by other southeastern states.

Step Two. Investigate your local situation. Don't take someone's word that there are no noxious weeds, look for yourself. If weeds exist in profusion, call your county agriculture or soil conservation agent to have him help you identify the invader. Have the agent provide you with available booklets on aquatic weeds and their control.

Step Three. Notify your local government bodies that you are aware of the existence of this problem, request their help for control measures.

Step Four. Become better informed. Call local chemical companies and ask for a speaker on the control of aquatic weeds. Write to the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission and request literature and movies on this subject. Write to the U. S. Department of Agriculture and request information. Request local evaluation from each agency, WARNING, do not accept quick answers.

Step Five. Each area of the state falls within a Water Management District. Find out the district appropriate for your area. Request information, evaluation, control steps, and research.

Step Six. Write to your local state delegation in Tallahassee and to the Governor. Inform them of your concern and request appropriate steps for the controlling of aquatic weeds.

Step Seven. Write again to Washington, and inform your delegation of your local problems as well as those of the entire state. Restate your previous request for research into and the control of aquatic weeds through the U. S. Army Corp of Engineers budget allocations to the USDA Crop Research Station in Florida. Be sure to share your interest in these problems with other civic groups, it is only through the efforts of aware citizens of Florida, that our water can be saved.

These steps for action stressed allocations through the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers to the USDA only because we were aware that such a funding program was already in existence, and at one time, a request for U. S. funds for Park Development was allocated wrong and the land was lost to private interests due to failure of the clubs to specify the proper agency.

This particular request for fund allocations may undergo a change in future appeals.

The Florida Federation of Garden Clubs' Conservation Division has also received copies of the above information and are following our course in planning an aquatic weed control project for their organization.

Once a year each FFWC club in the state is required to submit a written report on their activities in supporting their own, local, state, and national federation projects. These reports are known as the questionnaire. I was permitted to use the 109 Junior reports submitted to the State Junior Conservation Department Chairman in an effort to evaluate the response to the Temple Terrace Juniors' project. This questionnaire was prepared by the State Chairman in the early summer of 1967, so it contained no specific questions on this subject. A club's activities in this field could be entered under work on pollution control, flood control, the land and water division, and legislation in areas of Land and Water Resources, etc. Each club answers the questionnaire in their own way and while some are definitely vague, others read like a thesis. The leeway in answering made evaluation for our purpose difficult.

We do know that at least fifty of the clubs wrote to our legislators. Some of those, who were mentioned as being contacted are as follows: Senator Holland, Senator Smathers, Representatives Bennett, Gibbons, Gurney, Herlong, Kramer, and Rogers. Each district of the state had clubs report that they had written, so the number of Representatives contacted could well be larger. It is estimated that while some of the clubs mentioned only letters in their club's name, others had their entire membership participate, this would bring the reported figure of letters written to close to 500. Unestimated are the letters written by Seniors, but we do know that this level in Hillsborough County fully supported this program. Other clubs worked directly with agencies in Washington, the U. S. Public Health Service was one that was singled out for attention. Some clubs worked primarily on a local level with county and water management personnel. Others mentioned the USDA, The Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, and members of the Governor's Committee on Aquatic Research and Development. A total of 67 clubs reported actively working in some area of the project, others out of the 109 indicated that they planned to do so in the near future.

In an effort to carry the message of the importance of this project further, the Temple Terrace Juniors submitted nearly 1600 pages in various reports and entries to federation. Needless to say, it was one basic report of about 225 pages with copies made including the necessary alterations for each division entered.

It can be safely said that all state conservation chairmen in each division are now aware of the importance of adequate aquatic weed control to our state, as we received the first place Junior award for our club size, the overall sweep-stake award for the most outstanding conservation department in the Florida Federation, plus having our entry in the Clean Environment-Water Division take first place in the state and entered in the name of the Florida Federation into the General Federation of Women's Clubs' national competition. The club's report was also incorporated as part of the Florida Juniors' national conservation entry. So our message has gone to the National Chairman of these divisions, one in Maine and one in California, and then at least one of them was forwarded to the General Federation Headquarters in Washington for further review. We feel in this area, we have done well.

An analysis of the results of the response received by our reports and the supporting activities of the other clubs indicate that the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs' interest in aquatic weed problems in our state will not be short lived and until the problem is under control in every phase, those involved in the field of aquatic weed control will be under close scrutiny. The appeals for the necessary funds for research and control measures will continue as well as the active support of any program that shows itself to be a step in the right direction.

Won't you please accept the clubs' help, assist them in helping you by offering suggestions, speakers, evaluations, information, films, and recommendations for action that they may take. Many of you have said that until the public takes an interest and is willing to pay for the restoration of Florida's waters, little can be done. This group of dedicated women is willing to carry the responsibility of being the voice of the people, it is now your challenge to answer them and encourage their efforts to help you and our state.