

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Aquatic Plant Management: A Sense of History

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This year, our Society has returned to Lee County, Florida, and its roots. Thirty-six years ago, a group of dedicated professionals, under the leadership of T. Wayne Miller, Jr., met just a few miles from here at the Useppa Island Club and formed the Hyacinth Control Society. And, of course, in 1976 that organization became the Aquatic Plant Management Society (APMS). Two days ago, some of the Society's founding fathers, many of its past presidents, and a few of its long-standing friends returned to Useppa Island to commemorate that historic event. In the spirit of that reunion, I took the opportunity to review some of the history of the Society and the presidential addresses that have been published in the Journal. For in order to understand the present, and to plan for the future, it is often useful to examine the past. Only about half of the presidential addresses from past meetings have actually been printed in the Journal, so if your favorite president is not mentioned, please don't be disappointed.

Although these executive presentations reflected the realities and aspirations of various eras, two common themes were readily apparent: A) our Society is a very diverse group of individuals, comprising applicators and operational personnel, industrial formulators and developers, consultants, government and academic researchers, educators, resource managers, regulatory personnel, and water resource users; and B) as a group, we are very opinionated in our specific area of expertise, but dedicated to problem solving. Indeed, these characteristics have attracted and enhanced the participation of many members, including past presidents such as Joe Zolczynski, as noted in his address in San Antonio, Texas in 1994 (Zolczynski 1995).

But before we jump to the mid 1990's, let's peer deeper into the past. As might be expected, in the first decade or so, the presidential addresses were focused on the establishment of the Society, and the efforts to identify and define its basic scope and mission. These early local struggles were documented in the addresses delivered in the 1960's by past presidents such as Herb Friedman (Tallahassee, Florida, 1964), John Woods (Palm Beach, Florida, 1965), Zeb Grant (Lakeland, Florida, 1966), James Gorman (Fort Myers, Florida, 1967), Bob Blackburn (Winter Park, Florida, 1968), and Frank Wilson (West Palm Beach, Florida, 1969); and in the next decade by presidents Paul Cohee (Huntsville, Alabama, 1970), Bob Gates (Miami Springs, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1973), Al Burkhalter (Winter Park, Florida, 1974), Ray Spirnock (Fort Lauderdale, Florida, 1976), and Julian Raynes

(Chattanooga, Tennessee, 1979). However, once the shift to broaden this organization beyond Florida and plant "control" occurred, the complexity of our profession truly surfaced.

Several of the presidents in the past two decades have, for better or for worse, provided us with their wisdom, insight, encouragement, challenges, and predictions of the future. If you listen carefully, you will note that many of these topics and visions are still pertinent today; and some of their predictions have been quite accurate.

President Don Lee, at the Jacksonville, Florida, meeting in 1978, called for extensive fundamental research to develop technologies needed to cope with aquatic plant problems (Lee 1979). He also noted the need for developing selective weed control techniques; the increased understanding of the environmental fate of herbicides; and improving the means of assessing the benefits and impacts associated with aquatic plant control. Sound familiar?

Bill Rushing presided over the 20th meeting in Sarasota, Florida in 1980. His administration set the stage for our Society to begin to embrace the rest of the world and push for International recognition (Rushing 1981). That vision has been partially realized via our Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, meeting in 1985 and our first international meeting in Daytona, Florida in 1992.

In 1987, in Savannah, Georgia, President Dean Martin challenged us to provide scientific leadership and expertise in a world where the layman was increasingly dependent upon science, but scientifically illiterate (Martin 1988). Unfortunately, this sad state of affairs may have actually worsened in the past decade.

President Richard Couch addressed us in Scottsdale, Arizona in 1989, and offered up the concept of preventive aquatic plant management, and encouraged us to become better stewards of the aquatic environment (Couch 1990). He presented evidence in the literature from the early 1960's of an "aquatic ecosystem restoration" notion, and predicted a proliferation of those types of projects in the 1990s.

The following year (1990) in Mobile, Alabama, President David Sutton gave us his 10-year vision (Sutton 1991). Among other things he predicted that a shift toward species selective control would occur, and that herbicides would continue to be the primary tool for most management scenarios. He also envisioned increased efforts for combining grass carp and herbicides into an integrated management approach, as well as a considerable expansion of re-vegetation and restoration techniques to promote the growth of native plants as a preventive management strategy.

In 1992, Randall Stocker presided over our first official international meeting at Daytona Beach, Florida. On a positive note, he recognized that this event was opening interna-

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tional doors of information exchange, some of which had been closed for decades prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall (Stocker 1993). On a negative note, he warned of impending changes in aquatic plant management economics, a prediction that became reality with the election of the 104th US Congress only two years later.

He also criticized us for being willing to remain in the background of public perception and appreciation. For example, we focus too much on the secondary issue of controlling weeds, rather than proclaiming the credit we deserve for the primary benefits that our weed control practices deliver, e.g. improved fishing, irrigation, recreation, and property values, as well as safe and reliable drinking water supplies. He also saw the need for seriously addressing regulatory actions and their impact on our professions and on protecting aquatic resources.

This last point is a cornerstone of our abilities to consistently manage aquatic vegetation. Over the last two decades we have lost touch with the regulatory community. Our relationship with that group has become adversarial, rather than collaborative. Let me illustrate. If you were to review the US Army Corps of Engineer (USACE) reports from 25 years ago, you would discover that personnel from the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) pesticide group participated in, and even chaired, technical sessions held during several of the USACE Aquatic Plant Control Research Program review meetings. Can you imagine that happening today? And let's not forget that one of our own past Presidents, Roy Clark (Las Vegas, Nevada, 1982), was a prominent USEPA pesticide regulatory personality.

And people wonder why we always seem in conflict with regulators today? Well, we quit working with them to help solve problems! We must get that situation back on track again.

And perhaps the most sincere and illuminating advice given during any presidential address was also offered by Dr. Stocker. In reference to the spirit of that international gathering he proclaimed: "Shake it up, be bold, and if nothing else comes to mind, take a Californian to lunch!"

In 1995, President Steve de Kozlowski urged the attendees at the Seattle, Washington, meeting to focus on public education (de Kozlowski 1996). He pushed our interaction with water resource user groups, like Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (BASS), cultivating the concept of our Society emphasizing the benefits that weed control can provide to anglers or other primary users. Steve also challenged the APMS to bridge the gaps left by the shrinking government efforts, through creating new partnerships for the future.

So where does that leave the Society today, and where might that lead us as we are poised to enter the next millennium? First, we are probably in the best financial shape in our organization's history. This is not an accident. It happened because of hard work by many individuals (officers, directors, committee chairs, and others) over a long period of time; and through the generous support of our sponsors.

We continue to travel down the road of functioning as an international organization, as demonstrated by the influence and contribution of many of our members in aquatic plant management projects in Canada, Mexico, Europe, South America, Asia, Africa, Australia, and other locations; in the planning of a second international meeting in San Diego,

California, in the year 2000 (which will be our 40th anniversary); and in the nomination our first international candidate for President (Dr. Alison Fox of Great Britain).

Our education and information arm is improving and growing each year. Our annual meetings are well-attended and successful, the technical sessions are credible and issue-oriented, and the opportunities for informal (but nonetheless important) gatherings where information can be shared and compared on an individual basis are plentiful. The quality and scope of our peer-reviewed journal has continuously improved through the years.

Because of the shortfall in government dollars, the Society, and individuals members, are taking a leadership role in educating and informing national and regional policy-makers in the multitude of benefits derived in managing aquatic vegetation, particularly exotic nuisance species. This is allowing us to re-build some level of support in state and Federal appropriations. But the near future is clear: Federal fiscal support for our research and operational activities will be limited. The good old days are over. But the days of new partnerships and progress are ahead.

For the first time in history, the chemical control industry has collectively formed and is operating a non-profit national research and development organization (the Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Foundation, Inc.) dedicated to the environmentally-compatible management of aquatic weeds, thereby advocating the conservation and restoration of aquatic and wetland habitats. Active members of this Society are playing a leading role in the development of that Foundation.

The Society is also presently involved in re-establishing and strengthening old partnerships, and developing new ones, with the Weed Science Society of America, BASS, the North American Lake Management Society, state and Federal resource management and regulatory agencies, our sister regional APMS chapters, and others. We must continue to vigorously pursue these interactions and partnerships to communicate and portray the benefits of our mission on a regional, national, and even global scale.

In closing, I am very excited and optimistic about the state of aquatic plant management, and in the future course and purpose of this organization. Within our Society we have many up-and-coming individuals capable of fighting the battles and accepting the challenges ahead. And to the old guard, those who have cycled through the board and officer progression: Please stay involved with the Society, we need your experience and guidance.

In this time of transition, the APMS can and should lead the nation in developing and implementing the technology for managing aquatic plant communities, and all that they represent to our water resources. After all, the weeds are getting worse, the resource utilization pressure on our lakes and rivers is increasing, and people want problems solved.

So to borrow an appropriate phrase: If not us, then who; if not now, then when?

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