

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

The Aquatic Plant Management Society and Our Future Sphere of Influence

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As has been said by many of my illustrious predecessors, it has been a great honor and pleasure to serve as President of the Aquatic Plant Management Society. Despite the fact that from the moment of becoming Vice-President one has three years to prepare a Presidential Address, my final choice of topic resulted, like so much else in my life, from fortunate serendipity rather than any great strategy on my part. My immediate predecessor, Kurt Getsinger, used the location of the 1997 meeting in Ft. Myers as a cue for his address about a sense of history in aquatic plant management. He closed with optimistic comments about the current and future condition of our Society and industry. So it seemed logical to expand on this with a more detailed look into the future, and that was exactly the theme that David Spencer had chosen for the 1998 meeting, "Challenges for the Next Century".

As a credit to the power of national publicity drives, any references to the "next century" have become indelibly linked in my mind with the well-worn cliché of the last U.S. Presidential campaign, "Building a bridge to the 21st Century". Memorable indeed, but eventually one is forced to ask, "What *does* this mean?" Do we really *need* a bridge to the next century? What about those of us who aren't engineers or who procrastinate until it's too late? People worry about the millennium bug on their computers but what's going to happen to a large portion of the world's population when the clocks strike midnight and we haven't yet built our bridges to get to the 21st Century?

There is much of irrelevance to ponder on this topic but it brought me back to some other familiar phrases from our field. When, and by whom, was the metaphor of the "Biological Control Pipeline" developed? It was at least before I started coming to these meetings in 1987. And members of the APMS Board of Directors for the last year are probably pretty tired of hearing my pet phrase concerning APMS and "Our Sphere of Influence". But here I go again.

I envision that our sphere of influence is divided into two parts. One is the internal sphere of our current membership upon whom we have our most direct influence, and the other is a much larger sphere of all the influences that we can have on those who are never likely to become members, but are somehow connected to aquatic plants. In terms of the former group, I like to think that our provision of goods

and services to our membership is progressing satisfactorily. We seem to do our housekeeping duties well enough to have good publications and enjoyable meetings. But the viewpoint of an insider, who knows only-too-well our administrative strengths and weaknesses, is undoubtedly biased. Thus, in our continuing efforts to improve our services, I foresee the need for a thorough survey of our membership. So if a questionnaire about APMS arrives across your desk or e-mail at some point in the future, please take the time to give us your opinions, because keeping our membership satisfied should always be our primary responsibility.

Our external influences can also be divided into two components, education and outreach. I see these as vital foundations for any bridges or pipelines that are to be built, and I have used these interchangeable terms to distinguish between academic instruction and the broader education of the general public. I believe that APMS does a good job of providing opportunities for graduate students to participate in our Society and annual meetings. We have shown our commitment to this by the more than \$50,000 that has been raised for our Scholastic Endowment Fund, of which we can be justifiably proud. But that is a large and growing pool of money, and while we will continue to support student activities at our meeting, it has been a personal goal of mine to see more of this fund being spent on attracting students to our industry and Society. I am greatly honored to be able to announce the beginning of a program which we hope will provide a new opportunity for students to enter the field of aquatic plant management. In cooperation with the Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Foundation and most of the APMS chapters, we plan to offer a complete graduate assistantship later this year. This is a very exciting development and a bold commitment from the participating organizations, but one that we are convinced will pay dividends in the future by ensuring a route for future leaders in this industry to enter our discipline. I encourage all members to continue to support the Scholastic Endowment, and I hope that many research project proposals will be submitted for these assistantships.

Continuing our educational theme this year, we proposed (and the Society subsequently approved) the formation of a permanent committee for Education and Outreach. One of the many issues that will be addressed by this group will be how we can influence students even earlier in their lives, such as in grade-school. We have many motivated committee members with exciting ideas for this objective and I hope that we will be able to make progress here in the not too distant future.

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But this is one of the areas where our creativity may outpace our resources, and I think that it is crucial never to lose sight of the fact that we are a volunteer organization with relatively low membership fees. We have been well supported by our many sponsors but we must always remain realistic about setting goals that will not overburden our busy members and generous donors. Also, the further we wish to extend into the realm of grade-schools or extensive public education, the more we must recognize our limited experience. It is no good if we produce a resource that tells the story of aquatic plant management in just the way we desire, if that resource will never find its way, or be incorporated, into educational and publicity systems. We will need to consult with, or hire, appropriate professionals, and these services rarely come cheaply.

This is one of the reasons why I have come to realize over the last year that, for some of our education and outreach goals, we should plan to cooperate with other organizations at both the national and local levels. Developing and maintaining liaisons with appropriate societies, agencies, and corporations will be a very important method for APMS to expand our influence in a most resource-effective manner. We need to ensure that we make the most of our existing liaisons, such as the Memorandum of Understanding that we have to encourage information exchange with the Bass Anglers Sportsmans' Society, and we must look for new opportunities, such as cooperation with Ducks Unlimited or The Nature Conservancy.

Another aspect of outreach that will only thrive at the national level through professional liaisons are the issues of legislative tracking and influence. We currently contribute to the support of a professional Washington Liaison through the Weed Science Society of America and this has much greater potential value than any arrangement that we could make on our own. However, we have to set clear objectives as to what we hope to see accomplished by these liaisons, and we need criteria on which to regularly evaluate whether these relationships continue to be worthwhile. Not only do these types of cooperation require our financial commitment, but someone within APMS must keep track of the liaison and be available to provide a rapid response from our organization when necessary. Thus, we should not allow ourselves to be spread too thinly across too many diverse issues.

This may be a very important time for us to be sure that we are adequately represented in Washington, D.C. Invasive species are a fairly hot topic in many agencies and states and we must make the most of our strength as the group that has most experience with some of the world's worst plant invasions, the various examples of notorious aquatic weeds. The varied models of prevention, eradication, containment, and maintenance control that our members apply to aquatic weeds throughout

the United States give us a collective professional experience that we should promote as being highly valuable to any national programs that focus on invasive species.

At this point it seems appropriate to point out that I am proud to be the first APMS President in a particular category. I think that it says much for the increasing diversity of APMS that we have now had a president who is a federally-certified, card-carrying alien. In addition to its Immigration and Naturalization Service definition, the term "alien" is also frequently applied to undesirable non-indigenous species. I will leave it to you to decide whether or not I have been noxious and invasive!

And this brings me to the theme of our broadest sphere of influence, the global scale. We have plenty of potential for expansion in this arena: encouraging new members from around the world; forming international chapters, as is being attempted in the Nile Basin; and improving communications with international societies, such as the European Weed Research Society. The decision to hold another International Symposium in 2000 is important for increasing our global recognition, and I would encourage all our members to make a special effort to attend this meeting and to assist our Californian hosts in any way possible.

International communication is an area in which the advent of widely available electronic information transfer has been particularly valuable. We will undoubtedly use it extensively in publicizing and organizing the International Symposium. Now that we have an APMS website (www.apms.org) we must make as much creative use of it as we can. If you have suggestions for additions or improvements please do not hesitate to contact John Madsen as Chair of the Publications Committee. The website needs to be in a continuous state of expansion and evolution to be sure that both new and established members will keep visiting it.

Electronic advances are significant but I would like to close with a final comment about our most important asset: our people. One of the things that I enjoy most about APMS, and which makes me the most proud, is the quality of our membership. At every annual meeting, I am reminded that we have one of the most friendly and down-to-earth assemblages of professionals that I can imagine. I'm pretty sure that this is related to the practical nature of the things that we do and the challenging habitats in which we work. It's hard to be too pompous when wearing rubber boots! And whatever else we do in the years ahead (and it's easy to propose many things as one's term as President comes to an end), we must always value the people that we represent. I would encourage you all to honor APMS with your active participation so that we can strive to: keep our current members happy; attract new members; and inform everyone else of what it is that we do, and why it's important.