

## **No more “Free” Weed Treatment**

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**Overview.** The Lake Gaston Weed Control Council, in a meeting held April 4, 2002, announced that it has decided on a major new course of action. Abandoning its long-standing policy of using “contact” treatments to knock down hydrilla, the Council now hopes to gain better long-term control by using “systemic” chemicals to actually kill the weeds. The Weed Council believes that this approach should make the most efficient use of available funds over the long term. The bad news is that *homeowners and their associations will have to assume the expense of all short-term treatments.*

**Who pays for our weed treatment?** As has been reported in previous issues of the LGA Newsletter, the “free” treatments of the past have actually been funded by \$200,000 from the City of Virginia Beach; \$105,000 from the five counties surrounding the lake; and \$100,000 from the State of North Carolina, for a total of \$405,000. It is hoped that these funds will be available again this year, but budget problems in Raleigh may reduce North Carolina’s allocation. The Commonwealth of Virginia is expected to continue its no- contribution policy. So it seems reasonable to assume that this year’s budget will be no more than \$405,000 and quite possibly less.

Richard Hinterman, Owner of ANPC, has suggested that the Army Corps of Engineers’ (ACOE) Matching Funds program for Lake Restoration may be one opportunity for additional funding. This program, designed to help rid ACOE-operated waters of nuisance weeds, would match -- dollar-for-dollar -- locally raised funds. This could mean up to an additional \$405,000. In the past, Lake Gaston has been ineligible for these funds because the program was limited to lakes with active weed control research projects. Recently, ANPC (in conjunction with NC State University and the ACOE) has been conducting appropriate research, and Hinterman believes that we may now qualify for matching funds.

Unfortunately, just when it appears that we may be eligible for these matching funds, the Weed Council has learned that the program may be falling victim to budget cuts in Washington. A vote is due within the next several weeks. Because we feel strongly that this kind of research is important, LGA has written a letter to the appropriate US Senators and Congressmen, urging their endorsement of this program.

At the December 2001 Weed Council meeting, LGA proposed several funding options, including boat fees, gasoline tax, boat registration fees, and a dock fee to be administered by Dominion Power. Logistical and time considerations have ruled out each of these proposals.

**What would it cost to achieve true control?** Hinterman estimates that proper control of hydrilla could be achieved at a cost of \$1.2 million per year, over a five-year period, assuming that — once hydrilla was killed — the native plant Chara would have the opportunity to re-instate itself in the lake, making it difficult for hydrilla to regain a

foothold. From that time forward, ongoing control through spot treatments would cost an estimated \$500,000 annually.

**How is hydrilla currently being treated?** In the past, most of our treatments have been done with “contact” chemicals – i.e., chemicals that work on contact with the plant. Examples of “contact” chemicals include Endothol, Diquat, and Chelated Copper. It should be noted that *contact treatment does little to kill the tubers under the lake’s bottom, from which new plant growth emerges.*

A different type of chemical, Fluridone, which works systemically (through the roots), has proven to be more effective because it actually kills the plant. But it has limitations. Fluridone can only be used in very still water like the back end of coves and creeks, because — to be effective — it must remain in contact with the plant for a prolonged period. In addition, when Fluridone *is* used, the entire volume of water – shoreline to shoreline, surface to bottom – must be treated. Obviously, for this reason, Fluridone is not suitable for use along the shoreline of the main lake, or any body of water with significant current flow.

By contrast, contact treatments are applied on or near the surface and only to a depth of about ten feet. For example, a 100 foot wide cove, treated with a contact chemical, would only be treated perhaps 30 feet from the shoreline (to a depth of 10’), while with Fluridone, the entire 100 foot width of the cove -- surface to lake bottom -- would have to be treated. Another consideration is that contact treatments have little or no irrigation restrictions; Fluridone-treated water may not be used for irrigation for a period of 30 days.

According to ANPC’s records, Fluridone has been successfully used in a number of areas around Lake Gaston:

- In 1997, Dove Manor, Chamelion Heights, Speckle Cove, and others were treated. Follow-up spot treatment of these areas was not required until 1999.
- In 1998, Windward Shores, Crescent Beach, Heritage Point, and others were treated with Fluridone; in these areas spot treatments were not required until 2000.
- Similar treatments were made in 1999, and 2000, with similar results.
- In 2001, Fluridone was used in the extreme northern tip of Lizard Creek, extending out almost to Dove Manor. The result was that not only the area treated, but also much of Wildwood was greatly improved relative to previous years. ANPC believes that this is because current in the creek caused the Fluridone to gradually work its way downstream toward Wildwood Point, killing hydrilla along the way.

**What are the treatment plans for 2002?** Based on experience during the last several years, several facts are becoming clear:

- Approaches in previous years have not succeeded in reducing the amount of hydrilla in the lake.

- Early summer “contact” chemicals knock down the weeds for 6-8 weeks, but they do not kill them. Money spent on these treatments has little or no lasting value.
- Fall “contact” treatments do reduce the weed population somewhat, but they are too late to address recreational swimming and boating needs.
- Funding shortages limit the Weed Council either to dealing with the long-term problem, or to addressing short-term recreational needs – but not both.
- The planned long-term solution involves phased treatments of various areas of the lake with Fluridone. Once the lake floor becomes covered with Chara, these areas would only require small spot treatments. As a result, new areas could be treated in subsequent years.

Based on the above considerations, the Weed Council decided to put all available resources into Fluridone treatments. One result of this decision is that although approximately 2300 acres of hydrilla were treated last year with contact chemicals — this year, ANPC will probably be able to treat less than 1000 acres and the areas to be treated would be specifically selected by the Weed Council for their need and lack of current. See copy of the Weed Council’s letter, listing the areas that will receive Fluridone treatments this year, on page 7 of this newsletter.

**What does this mean to me?** What this means to most Lake Gaston property owners is that *treatment to knock down the weeds in early summer will no longer be “free”*. Those of us needing to clear our swimming and boating areas of hydrilla will be required to do so at our own expense. Public funds will only be used to treat selected areas with Fluridone, as listed in their Press Release..

**What firms are available to do private treatment?** As of this writing, the Weed Council knows of two firms on the lake that have the proper credentials and are actively seeking this business. They are:

Aquatic Eco-Systems (434) 689-9333  
 Aquatic Nuisance Plant Control (ANPC), (252) 586-2900

It is important to ensure that any licensed applicator you hire be properly insured against potential damage to the environment. *The individual who hires the work to be done can be held liable for any damage caused by improper treatment.*

**How much will it cost?** In a discussion with Skip Wiegersma, General Manager of ANPC, LGA learned that many factors come into play when figuring the cost of treatment: depth of water, waterfront width, and number of adjacent properties participating. (In other words, if a group of ten or more neighbors – or a subdivision – get together, ANPC can share the cost of travel to/from a given location and reduce the price). A “typical” contact treatment job — guaranteed for a period of up to 8 weeks -- might cost between \$250 and \$300, assuming at least ten lots could be treated at a time. So the least expensive way may be for Homeowner Associations to get together and contract for treatment. Clearly, one should ‘shop around’ before selecting a treatment source.

**Guidelines for private treatment.** Dominion Power has added *Appendix E* to the *Shoreline Management Plan*, which offers guidelines as to how to obtain private treatment. Excerpts from the Guidelines:

- “No unlicensed or unregistered individual or group may apply aquatic weed control chemicals within the Lake Gaston or Roanoke Rapids Lake Project boundaries.”
- “If an unlicensed individual applies a weed control chemical to state waters and on Dominion land, they open themselves to potential prosecution...”
- “If an individual group (i.e. homeowners association) desires to apply chemical weed control in the area between their extended side property lines or within a subdivision cove(s) by a registered applicator other than ANPC, then ANPC or Dominion must be notified at least 5 working days prior to application. If Dominion is contacted, Dominion shall relay information to ANPC to ensure the area treated is not “double treated” by ANPC...” Notification of intention to treat will require the following information: Name, Phone, Location, Contractor, Contractor phone, Type of herbicide, Date of treatment, Area treated (ft<sup>2</sup>), Plant Species targeted, Treatment chemical.
- No native aquatic vegetation (e.g. water willow, cattails, reeds, etc.) may be removed ... by either mechanical or chemical methods without a Construction and Use Permit from Dominion.

In addition to these warnings and guidelines, Joe Peterson of Dominion Power pointed out the hazards of “moonlight” treatment with chemicals such as Copper Sulfate:

- Over-treatment can result in fishkills and other visual evidence leading to financial liability and prosecution.
- Copper Sulfate, in particular, is very corrosive to pontoon boats with aluminum floats and can cause expensive damage in a short amount of time.

**What can be done about the funding problem?** Clearly, we are in a financial crisis with regards to weed control. The local press is beginning to talk about an unusable lake, and plummeting property values. LGA is not ready to forecast consequences to this extreme, but we do feel that some sort of action is indicated.

LGA has been working with the Weed Council for many years, but many of us failed to understand what was really happening, and simply wanted our dockside to be free of weeds. We now realize that this course of action was short-sighted and ill-informed. Recently, the Weed Council asked LGA to help them with publicity; we agreed to do so, hoping to avoid similar misconceptions in the future.

An interesting development — though seemingly unrelated — is that Smith Mountain Lake now has hydrilla problems as well, and they have come to the Weed Council and LGA, looking for help with their weed problems. Smith Mountain Lake is entirely contained within Virginia, and probably has more political clout than Lake Gaston. Dr. Elton Brown, Chairman of the Weed Council, believes that an aggressive *joint*

campaign, directed at the Virginia legislature, might be more successful than we have been able to be, working alone.

LGA plans to work with the Weed Council to determine whether there is anything our members can do to motivate legislators to help obtain additional funding for Lake Gaston weed treatment. If you have suggestions on how we can have the most impact, please discuss with one of the LGA Directors from your County.

**Conclusion.** Suffice to say, the weed problem in Lake Gaston has become severe. The Weed Council now estimates that approximately 25% of the lake is infested with hydrilla. Previous efforts to knock down the weeds have proven to be nothing more than a band-aid on a festering wound. While we were clearing our swimming areas for short-term benefits, the long-term problem continued to grow almost unabated. For the first time, this year, most Lake Gaston residents will be required to pay for weed control – or live with hydrilla. Although this is bad news, the good news is that we will finally begin to address the problem *at the roots!*