



The Lake Beautyberry Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society, PO Box 88 Umatilla, FL 32784

December 1, 2011

Senator Alan Hays
871 South Central Ave
Umatilla, FL 32784

Dear Senator Hays,

The Lake Beautyberry Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society works to improve the quality of our ecosystems in Lake County, by promoting the preservation, conservation and restoration of the native plants and native plant communities that both we and our wildlife depend upon for healthy living.

One of the grave threats to our natural lands and waters comes from invasive exotic plants. Such plants can crowd out or simply smother the native plants, resulting in the loss of the various services which they provide, and at the same time, reduce the strength and resilience of our ecosystems due to the loss of bio-diversity.

Consequently, we are dismayed to learn that a proposal to permit hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillata*) to take over perhaps as much as 30% of Lake Apopka is actually being given serious consideration by various public officials and some local government agencies. Indeed, it is astonishing that such an action would even be proposed for a plant that has done so much damage to Florida waters over the past several decades, a plant on which our state has spent tens of millions of dollars in efforts toward its control and elimination. That damage is why the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has listed hydrilla as a Class I Prohibited Plant.

But our state is not the only jurisdiction working to prevent the spread of this noxious aquatic weed. Hydrilla is also of concern to –

- the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force, an interagency task force comprised of 13 Federal agencies, at least 3 of which are involved with hydrilla in Florida,
- 18 other states that are spending substantial public funds to eliminate or at least reduce the spread of hydrilla within their borders, and
- even a number of states not yet invaded by this pest plant. These states are engaged in active public awareness campaigns to prevent its introduction into their waters.

Since a small piece of a hydrilla stalk (as little as an inch, with a single whorl of 4-8 leaves) can start a new plant and a new infestation, it is critically important that control measures not be relaxed; the more there is, the more it will spread. This is especially the case in lakes like Apopka where, if hydrilla is not well controlled, boating can easily result in the production of numerous small fragments. Were this permitted to occur in Lake

Apopka which is at the upstream end of a significant watershed, the inevitable result would be to spread the plague even more widely.

Hydrilla also can produce more than a million tubers per acre, rhizomes that stay fertile in lake bottoms for years, each one of which can become a new plant. At the same time, during the fall & winter, it also produces similar quantities of turions, small dormant sprouts that float freely and start new plants in the spring if they land in a suitable spot.

These remarkable growth and reproductive abilities are why the scientists at the University of Florida who study invasive aquatic plants have ranked hydrilla as the second most dangerous of 129 aquatic plants, second only to the scourge of water hyacinths. Moreover, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Hydrilla Position Statement notes that: **"Once established, hydrilla has proven difficult if not impossible to eradicate with current technology and is expensive to manage."**

The difficulty and expense of management make deliberate expansion of a hydrilla infestation bad financial policy as well as bad environmental policy. State agencies and local governments cannot afford to let hydrilla get out of control, since in addition to adverse environmental impacts, large quantities of hydrilla impede water flows, thereby cause flooding and possibly impair agricultural irrigation operations. Although some studies suggest that limited amounts of hydrilla may be to the liking of fishermen, there are large economic losses when hydrilla gets out of control and shuts down the recreational uses of a waterbody.

But control is expensive. In contrast with annual expenses of about \$50,000/year for efforts to restrict the hydrilla to it's approx. 300 A. site in Lake Apopka (approx. 1% of the lake), each cycle of control could cost well in excess of \$1 million if the proposed expansion were permitted. And even in the extremely unusual situation of Lake Tohopekaliga, where hydrilla has aided in saving the endangered everglades kite, the timing and extent of control efforts is severely limited by a number of complex constraints, and the costs of control in the Kissimmee Chain approach \$5 million/year.

After the expenditure of over \$100 million already on the restoration of Lake Apopka, and with years of effort starting to pay off as native plants begin to return to its shores and bottom while thousands of birds are once again enjoying its wetlands, it would be a tragic error to turn back the progress that has been made.

Please use your utmost efforts to prevent a costly debacle in Lake Apopka, and to assure that other lakes in Florida are not similarly threatened. Your assistance on this matter will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

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LCWA: Maimone, Perry
FFWCC: Barco, Wiley, David
SJRWMD: Daniels, Tanzler