



REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
SAVANNAH DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS
100 W. OGLETHORPE AVENUE
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA 31401-3604

Planning Division

PUBLIC NOTICE
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

SUBJECT: Notice of Availability of a proposed Avian Vacuolar Myelinopathy Plan (AVMP), Draft Environmental Assessment (EA), and Draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) to evaluate the potential impacts of managing hydrilla within J. Strom Thurmond Lake (JST) to reduce occurrences of Avian Vacuolar Myelinopathy in bald eagles.

Notice of the following is hereby given:

a. Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, notice is hereby given that the Savannah District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) proposes an integrated approach of biological and chemical control. The proposed action is made up of an incremental stocking of certified sterile triploid grass carp (*Ctenopharyngodon idella*- triploid) (CSTGC) at JST plus limited herbicide application to control hydrilla.

b. Savannah District announces the availability to the public of an AVMP, Draft EA, and Draft FONSI concerning the control of hydrilla a JST. In the proposed AVMP, an integrated approach of biological and chemical control of hydrilla is recommended. Downloaded document copies may be obtained from the District website at <http://1.usa.gov/1VIDgsw>. Copies may also be requested via email by contacting Mr. Nathan Dayan at the following address email CESAS-PD@usace.army.mil, or at (912) 652-5172.

c. Written statements regarding the Draft EA and FONSI for the proposed action will be received at the Savannah District Office until

12 O'CLOCK NOON, May 31, 2016

from those interested in the activity and whose interests may be affected by the proposed action.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Eighty-one dead bald eagles have been recovered at JST. AVM has been confirmed in 29 of the dead eagles. Aspergillosis was the cause of one mortality. The cause of the remaining 51 mortalities could not be determined due to decomposition. Aquatic vegetation management is needed at JST to minimize eagle

deaths linked to hydrilla and its associated toxic cyanobacteria. Based on the technical analyses and in collaboration with Federal and State natural resource agencies, USACE developed a plan (the proposed AVMP) that would reduce the acres of hydrilla in JST, thereby reducing potential impacts to bald eagles from AVM. This should minimize overall adverse environmental impacts.

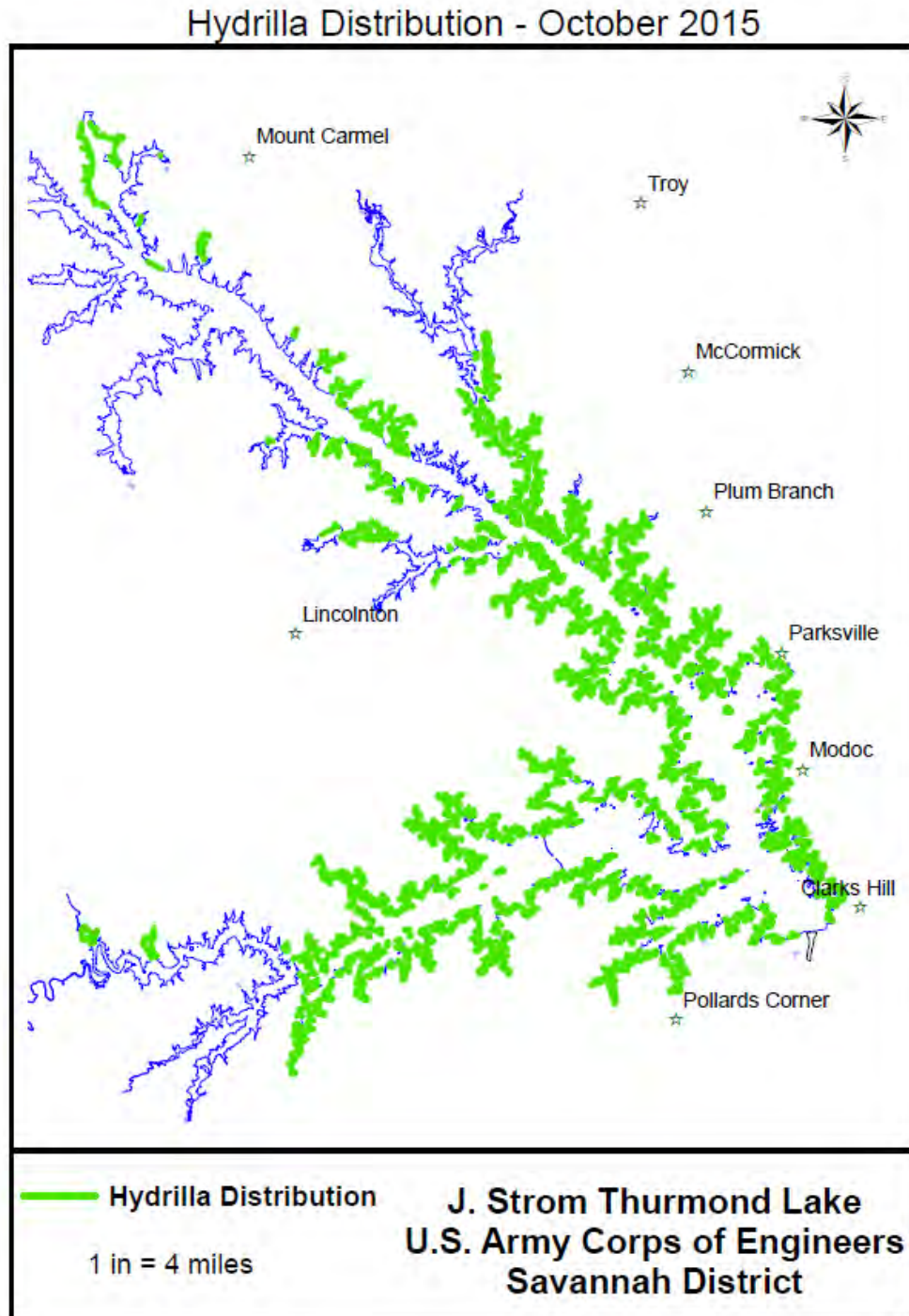


Figure 1: 2015 Hydrilla Distribution

Figure 1 shows the distribution of Hydrilla in 2015.

Alternative plans were developed as part of the planning process. The alternatives that were considered were as follows:

a. **Without Project Condition/No Action Alternative:** This alternative would not increase treatment to reduce hydrilla. Savannah District would continue to follow its existing Aquatic Plant Management Plan and continue spot herbicide treatments at high public use areas such as boat ramps, courtesy docks, and swimming beaches. Hydrilla and the associated toxic cyanobacteria would likely persist, resulting in AVM occurrence in certain species and potential mortalities. In 2014, the USFWS indicated it may require CESAS to request them to issue a “take permit” due to continued bald eagle mortalities at JST.

b. **Alternative 1 - Biological Control:** Under this alternative, Certified Sterile Triploid Grass Carp (CSTGC) would be stocked at standard stocking rates of 20 per vegetated acre for approximately 10 years, followed by maintaining 1 grass carp per 8 surface acres. The fish would be obtained from a certified supplier to ensure their sterility. The CSTGC would be at least 10-12 inches in total length (TL) to reduce predation. In 1985, the USFWS issued a Biological Opinion stating that use of triploid grass carp for aquatic weed control is environmentally safe and that triploid grass carp may be stocked in closed or open waters. The USFWS oversees certification of triploid grass carp via the National Triploid Grass Carp Inspection and Certification Program (NTGCICP). Certified triploid grass carp should not be confused with other types of Asian carp that are considered invasive species, including bighead carp, black carp, silver carp (jumping carp), and diploid (non-sterile) grass carp.

c. **Alternative 2 - Chemical Control:** Under this alternative, herbicide would be applied across all areas of hydrilla infestation in accordance with an AVM Management Plan. Aquatic plant management activities would be planned in an environmentally-minded manner and conducted within U.S. EPA guidelines and appropriate label recommendations to minimize any adverse impacts from large scale vegetation management activities. The safe and effective use of aquatic herbicides to reduce nuisance levels of aquatic plants has been demonstrated nationwide. While herbicides applied in large reservoirs generally do not eradicate nuisance plants, they can provide long term management. The results of the applications reduce water user conflicts without negative impacts to the natural resources.

d. **Alternative 3 - Tentatively Selected Plan (TSP) Integrated Approach with Incremental Grass Carp Stocking and Herbicide Use:** Under this alternative, CSTGC would be stocked and herbicide applications would be employed. CSTGC stocking would target 7.5 fish per vegetated acre in Year 1 and 9.75 fish per vegetated acre in Year 2, resulting in a total of 15 fish per vegetated acre (including 2.25 fish per acre to offset 30% mortality rate). As part of this integrated approach, spot treatments (at a minimum 200 acres) of herbicide would also occur in areas where hydrilla is at or near the surface with priority given to those areas known to have high concentrations of

American coots and past eagle mortalities. Only those herbicides labeled as “aquatic use” by the U.S. EPA would be used.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY EVALUATION:

Environmental Assessment: Savannah District has prepared a Draft EA and found that an Environmental Impact Statement will not be required for this action. The Draft EA is being coordinated concurrently with this Notice to Federal and State natural resource agencies for review and comment.

Wetlands: The biological portion of the TSP would result in no direct or indirect adverse impacts to palustrine wetlands. Triploid grass carp are not likely to consume native wetland plants, but will likely consume some native SAVs. Research has shown grass carp have a strong affinity for hydrilla. However, negative impacts to SAV can be expected if the excessive stocking of grass carp occurs. The chemical portion of the TSP would result in direct short term adverse impacts may occur to palustrine wetlands, including native vegetation and the state-listed shoals spider-lily. These impacts would be mitigated by controlling the treatment boundaries adjacent to existing wetlands. Most aquatic herbicides are non-selective, therefore SAVs will be negatively impacted in the treatment areas. No long term adverse impacts to native wetland vegetation are anticipated if mitigation measures are used to prevent over spraying.

Threatened, Endangered and other Protected Species: Implementation of the TSP would reduce AVM-related mortalities in bald eagles (a protected species). Grass carp may have a negative impact on the shoals spider-lily (state threatened species) if those fish migrate up Broad River to Anthony Shoals during periods of high flow when the plants are inundated. However, that migration is unlikely due to the lack of SAVs in the Broad River portion of the reservoir to attract the grass carp. The shoals spider-lily only grows in the rapids of Anthony Shoals on the Broad River portion of JST Lake. Herbicide applications are impractical in this area due to river flow, inaccessibility, and rapids. Minimization actions to reduce the likelihood of affecting the shoals spider-lily would be avoiding herbicide application in locations where the shoals spider-lily is present. The TSP is not likely to adversely affect any listed species, or their designated critical habitats.

Cultural Resources: With implementation of the TSP, no impacts to cultural or archaeological resources are expected. Section 106 concurrence is being requested from the Georgia and South Carolina State Historic Preservation Offices while the Draft EA is out for agency and the public review.

Essential Fish Habitat: Savannah District determined that the project area is outside the coastal zone and there would be no direct or indirect effects on Essential Fish Habitat (EFH).

Water Quality Certification: Section 401 Water Quality Certifications from the States of Georgia and South Carolina are not needed for the proposed action. USACE

would follow the terms of the States of Georgia's and South Carolina's general NPDES permit for the application of herbicides into public waters.

Coastal Zone Consistency: Savannah District determined that the project area is outside the coastal zone and there would be no direct or indirect effects on the coastal zone, therefore, the EA constitutes a Negative Determination under the Coastal Zone Management Act.

Clean Air Act: With implementation of the TSP, minor temporary increases in air emissions may occur from boat motors and sprayers during targeted herbicide applications, but these impacts are expected to be insignificant. This action is being coordinated with the U.S. EPA. No violations of air quality standards are expected.

Application of the Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines: No dredging or sediment disposal activities are included in the proposed plan. Therefore, a Section 404(b)(1) evaluation is not required.

Public Interest Review: The decision whether to proceed with the project as proposed will be based on an evaluation of the probable impact, including cumulative impacts, of the proposed activity on the public interest. That decision will reflect the national concern for both the protection and use of important resources. The benefits which reasonably may be expected to accrue from the proposal will be balanced against its reasonably foreseeable detriments. All factors that may be relevant to the proposal will be considered. Among these are conservation, economics, aesthetics, general environmental concerns, wetlands, historic properties, fish and wildlife, land use, recreation, water supply and conservation, water quality, energy needs, safety, consideration of property ownership, environmental justice, and, in general, the needs and welfare of the people.

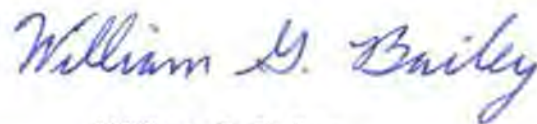
Public Workshops: Two public workshops will be held to provide information and take comments from the public. The workshops will be from 6 pm to 8 pm on the following dates and locations

Date: <i>May 16th</i> Location: McCormick County High School 6981 Hwy 28 South McCormick, SC 29835	Date: <i>May 17th</i> Location: Eubank Blanchard Community Center 6868 Cobbham Road Appling, GA 30802
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Consideration of Public Comments: USACE is soliciting comments from the public; Federal, State, and local agencies and officials; Native American Tribes; and other interested parties in order to consider and evaluate the impacts of the proposed activity. Any comments received will be considered by the USACE in its deliberations on this action. To make this decision, comments are used to assess impacts to endangered species, wetlands, historic properties, water quality, general environmental

effects, and the other public interest factors listed above. Comments are used in the preparation of the Final EA and FONSI pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. Comments are also used to determine the need for a public hearing and to determine the overall public interest of the proposed activity.

Comment Period: Anyone wishing to comment to the Corps on this proposed action should submit comments no later than the end of the comment period shown in this notice, in writing, to the Savannah District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Planning Division, ATTN: Mr. Nathan Dayan (PD), 100 West Oglethorpe Avenue, Savannah, Georgia 31401-3640, by FAX to 912-652-5787, or by emailing the comments to the following address: CESAS-PD@usace.army.mil.



William G. Bailey
Chief, Planning Division