

APPENDIX O . AQUATIC PLANT MANAGEMENT REVIEW PROCESS

Section 369.20 (2), F.S., authorizes the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to "...direct the control, eradication, and regulation of noxious aquatic weeds...so as to protect human health, safety, and recreation, and to the greatest degree practicable, prevent injury to plant and animal life and property." Further, Section 369.22 (3) requires that "...the control of nonindigenous aquatic plants be carried out primarily by means of maintenance programs, rather than eradication or complaint spray programs, "...for the purpose of achieving more effective control at a lower long-range cost. It is also the intent of the Legislature that the department guide, review, approve, and coordinate all non-indigenous aquatic plant control programs within each of the water management districts..."

The DEP Bureau of Invasive Plant Management (BIPM) carries out aquatic plant management control responsibilities via a permitting program and through providing funds to contractors for managing aquatic plants in Florida public waters. Public waters are defined as sovereignty lands with access via a public boat ramp. There are 450 public waters with a combined surface area of about 1.27 million acres. Contractors include private companies, county governments, and water management districts. In the early 1980s, much of the aquatic plant control was conducted by water management district crews. Since then, Northwest and Suwannee River WMDs no longer participate and crews from the other three districts manage plants in relatively few waters within district boundaries; replaced by private sector and county government contractors. For example, the SJRWMD controls aquatic plants under BIPM contract in only eight of the 153 public waters eligible for funding through the BIPM within district boundaries.

Each February-March, agency field representatives with aquatic plant management responsibilities draft basic management plans and propose budgets for the ensuing state fiscal year (July 1 – June 30). Agencies include BIPM, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC), and participating water management districts and county governments. These workplan requests are submitted to the BIPM and are forwarded to agencies like FWCC, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the US Army Corps of Engineers during April-May for review and comments related to their missions in Florida public waters. BIPM administrative and field staff meet with field representatives from affected government agencies and government contractors the second week of May to authorize general aquatic plant management workplans for the fiscal year and to establish a budget for this work.

Management allocations are established for about 350 waters each year. Funds are allocated on a statewide priority basis with the invasive floating plants, water hyacinth and water lettuce as the BIPM's primary management objective. The submersed invasive plant, hydrilla is represented in the next four priority categories. Waters eligible for aquatic plant management funding and funding priorities are addressed in the Rules of Chapter 62C-54, FAC. Workplans and budget allocations are incorporated into Task Assignments and executed on July 1.

Aquatic plant control applies the concept of adaptive management. Plant growth is highly variable with prime influences from weather, water clarity and chemistry. Therefore, while management concepts are agreed upon at the beginning of the year, management

operations and budgets are flexible and adapt to changing conditions. Agency personnel with aquatic plant management responsibilities conduct routine inspections of public waters and are in frequent communication. If additional plants need to be controlled requiring additional funding, the same agencies that commented on the original workplan are consulted regarding the proposed change. If anticipated plant problems do not materialize, then funds are reallocated elsewhere in the state.

Responsible participation in developing aquatic plant management plans requires a detailed understanding of potential invasive plant impacts as well as the more than 50 biological, chemical, mechanical and physical management tools that are available to integrate into programs that consider all of the uses and functions of the infested water body. Additionally, participants are asked to consider aquatic plant management plans from an ecosystem level perspective rather than from a single issue focus since invasive aquatic plants usually impact multiple uses and functions of Florida public waters. Since most stakeholders do not have this level of expertise, their input is best addressed at lake association meetings or task forces that meet regularly and have the time for in-depth discussion on various management tools and strategies including the consequences of not managing, or ineffectively managing, invasive aquatic plants. BIPM, FWCC, and government contractor staff usually attend these stakeholder meetings throughout the year and their draft workplans reflect meaningful input received at these meetings.

For more information on aquatic plant management funded by BIPM, refer to the BIPM web site at <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/lands/invaspec/2ndlevpgs/Aquaticplnts.htm>. Also, consult the BIPM general site on aquatic plants and their management in Florida waters at <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/guide>.