



AERF Stakeholder Survey Yields Positive Results

By Kate Wilson

While the AERF has been serving an important niche in the aquatic plant management industry for nearly 17 years now, they have not previously solicited the feedback of stakeholders. These stakeholders primarily include industry professionals, regulatory agencies, and academics that specialize in the aquatic species field. However, stakeholders may also include shoreline homeowners, outdoor enthusiasts, interested citizens, students, non-profit groups, and more. With such a diverse stakeholder base, it is important that the AERF be aware of the knowledge, attitudes, and thoughts of its constituents. This will help ensure that the AERF is meeting the expectations and needs of the stakeholders in order to provide the best service possible and maintain interest in the organization. Also, this is another point in time where the political climate and public sentiment towards invasive species and plant management seems to be undergoing a change. There is increased awareness in invasive species issues, but political support and funding for management and prevention is harder to come by than ever. The US Army Corps of Engineers APCRP is once again facing funding challenges and federal funds for aquatic invasive species are drying up.

The AERF is well-positioned to fill gaps in the field, support ongoing research necessary for the industry to evolve, and continue to serve as liaison between the industry and the regulatory agencies. In order to serve this role however, it is imperative that the AERF receive feedback from stakeholders. One of the most important aspects of this feedback is stakeholder thoughts on the future of the industry and the AERF as an organization.

The AERF is no stranger to education and outreach. They provide regular email updates on relevant aquatic invasive species topics to a list of subscribers. They also have a Facebook page and website for communicating with their stakeholders. Another important aspect of this survey is to receive feedback on whether or not these communication efforts are reaching their target audience and providing useful and timely information.

A survey of this kind can provide valuable information on who the stakeholders are and whether or not their needs and expectations are being adequately met. It can also provide valuable insight as to what these stakeholders see as the most important aspects of the AERF role, challenges in the industry in the future, and how best to address these looming issues. Sometimes the best thing to do to ensure that you are hitting your mark and reaching your stakeholders is simply to ask them.

Hopefully you participated in the recent survey. If so, we thank you for your time and very important feedback!

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Website Redesign

For those of you who might be wondering, we haven't been intentionally ignoring website updates. We are very close to releasing a newly designed website, and it has been tough to keep the information synchronized between the old and new. Watch for the new site in the coming weeks.



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find links from our website www.aquatics.org



PLANT CAMP: Changing Awareness and Understanding about Invasive Plants with Grassroots Support

By Amy Richard, UF/IFAS Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants,

Survey results from this year's invasive plant workshop for teachers, aka PLANT CAMP (held June 17-21, 2012), continue to suggest the week-long event is raising awareness and even greater acceptance of invasive plant management methods, while also inspiring educators to take their new knowledge back to the classroom.



Florida science teachers learn first-hand about the ecological and environmental impacts of hydrilla during a PLANT CAMP 2012 field trip on Lake Toho. The boat transportation was made possible by AERF and Boggy Creek Airboats.

Ever since the UF-IFAS Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants (CAIP) began hosting the annual workshops, we've been using pre- and post-tests to determine if participants were experiencing gains in baseline knowledge about invasive plants and the impacts they are having in Florida. For the past two years, we've also been using the opportunity to ask questions about awareness and acceptance of various aquatic plant management methods and strategies. The results continue to surprise (and encourage) us. When asked if the teachers agreed or disagreed with the necessity to control aquatic invasive plants using herbicides, mechanical, biological and physical control (respectively), they responded with a major shift into the "agree" and "strongly agree" categories after the workshop, whereas pre-workshop survey responses were divided across all response categories (i.e., strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree, strongly disagree or don't know). Even more surprising were results on the question of whether they favored or opposed use of these same four control methods. Responses were

split in the pre-test survey. However, post-test surveys showed a majority shifted into the "somewhat favor" and "strongly favor" columns. For herbicides, the "strongly favor" responses jumped from 4.3% to 65.2%. The use of biological control methods showed a similar change in attitude, increasing from 41% to 87%. Also, in the post-workshop survey, "strongly opposed" responses fell from 22% to 0 and "somewhat opposed" responses fell from 30.4% to 8.7%.

Follow-up is needed to see how teachers are sharing their new knowledge with students and colleagues (96% said they plan to teach about aquatic invasive plants during this academic school year). However, it is affirming to learn that education and outreach efforts can make a difference in attitudes about plant management, even among those who began their PLANT CAMP experience with strong opinions against specific control methods.

These results are also a testament to individuals and groups who have seen the importance of investing in outreach and education. Seven years after its infancy, the UF/IFAS Florida Invasive Plant Education Initiative enjoyed more grass-roots support than ever for its 2012 workshop. Adding to the continued long-term funding from the Invasive Plant Management Section of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, nine organizations provided co-sponsorship or in-kind donations. Mid-day meals, energy snacks, hydrating drinks, an airboat field trip, charter bus and conference room costs and PLANT CAMP t-shirts, were made possible with the additional outside support.



PLANT CAMP 2012 participants learn about biological control with a hands-on alligatorweed flea beetle lab activity for the classroom (courtesy of Dr. Bill Overholt/UF-IFAS).

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Controlling Invasive Plants Carries Many Benefits to Anglers

Managers often produce contour and plant location maps that anglers seek

By Jeff Holland, Bassmaster Southern Open Pro, www.jeffhollandfishing.com

When aquatic plant managers survey nuisance weed infestations on lakes, reservoirs, or streams they gather data on plant species, locations, and densities. In today's electronic age, plant locations on large waterbodies are normally marked by gps coordinates. During the planning process managers overlay plant data on maps to show the areas that require plant control. These maps provide the kind of information many anglers searching for.

Some management plans target plants to keep invasive species under control and others target infestations of nuisance or topped-out weeds. Regardless of the reason, plant managers conduct surveys to find where plants exist and maps are the most useful tool for sharing the information.

Anglers catch more fish by knowing where aquatic plants grow and where they do not, and working plant maps can show if a favorite fishing hole is choked out with weeds or open for fishing. Anglers should not expect to see polished maps of the entire watersystem, but need to realize that many maps are a work in progress intended to catalog plants and show where potential treatments may be needed. Still, knowing where plants grow and where they do not is another benefit anglers reap from their local plant managers.

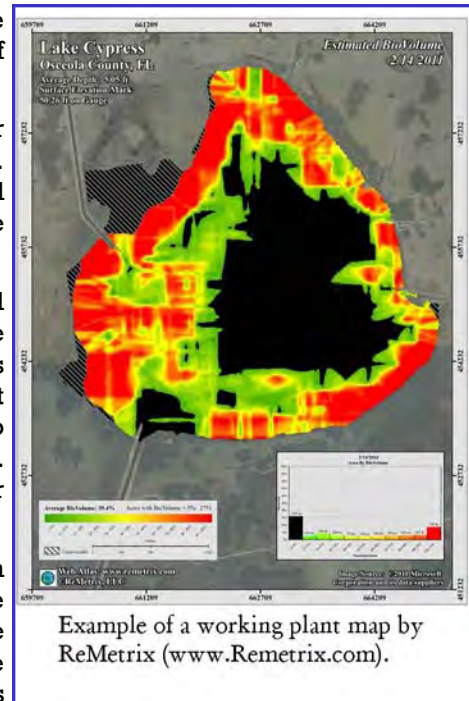
In addition, plant managers gather depth data to calculate application rates as one of their best management practices (BMPs) when they use herbicides. Frequently, this data is collected locally from recordable fish finders that produce excellent contour maps. While managers use the data for calculating water volume and application rates, anglers reap the benefit of these maps for finding key fishing locations. Finding the deepest plant beds are easy when depth data is included on a map of plant locations.

GPS technology is being integrated with more and more products so anglers now have the ability to buy fish finders with sonar-recording gps-technology. Likewise, a variety of companies have stepped forward to perform lake mapping services and many offer service plans that accept angler-data to produce personalized chart maps. These services fit perfectly with fishing guides who want to produce their own "secret" maps.

I encourage anglers to contact their plant managers and wildlife agencies to see if maps or data are available. Besides making your fishing easier, your inquiry will help build a stronger angler-relationship with plant managers and wildlife officials.

Check out this example of maps available in Florida by Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and

the University of Florida: <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/manage/overview-of-florida-waters/public-waters>



Example of a working plant map by ciBioBase (www.cibiobase.com).

Reaching Out With Aquatic Messages

By Aaron Hobbs, President RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment)®

Like AERF, RISE has made a commitment to invest in research. Our research focuses on gauging consumer opinion leader and policymaker sentiment about pesticide products and their use. We continue to learn from this process, which we approach without bias to learn what we can, not what will validate our own perceptions or processes. This empirical and open approach has yielded interesting and positive results:

- 94 percent of consumers polled recognize at least one benefit pesticides provide to society. Products are viewed as a valuable option for controlling problems in a reliable, proven manner.
- People want to hear how issues affect them personally.
- People are seeking balance, choice and priorities from legislation, and they want all sides of the issue considered when pesticide use is the subject.
- And, people have questions and want answers; however, having questions does not mean there are negative perceptions.

All of this is great news, but what does it mean to AERF? You have a great opportunity to share your story about the aquatic applications that are essential to so many aspects of everyday life, especially water quality. Further, you have a receptive consumer and policymaker audience for your information when it is communicated in conversational terms. As just one example of consumer receptivity and awareness: This past fall and winter we spent time in the Northeast at several events, including a regional conference of science teachers with experience from kindergarten through college. We participated in the conference to promote good information available on our www.debugthemyths.com site and to test awareness about invasive terrestrial and aquatic weeds. I'm pleased to report awareness was off the scale and our RISE invasive weed poster quickly disappeared from our booth! Many of the teachers we talked with reported daily struggles away from the classroom related to protecting their own property from invasive aquatic plants. Many of the teachers reported they include discussion about control options in their teaching about the harm from such plants and the need for efficacious approaches and products. This level of understanding about the benefits of aquatic applications and their purpose opens up many opportunities to widely share information outside of scientific and policy forums!

If you are not already engaged in outreach, one good first step is to join the RISE grassroots network. Contact Tim Maniscalco, tmaniscalco@pestfacts.org, or grassroots@pestfacts.org to learn more. Also, visit www.debugthemyths.com for talking points or to contribute to one of our blog postings. I urge you to look for opportunities to amplify news about AERF's good work and research and to join more than 500 members in the aquatics business as part of our industry grassroots network.

Pesticide Use and Labeling - Did You Know Series

Donald Stubbs retired Associate Director Registration Division Office of Pesticide Programs

Did you know you can use an aquatic pesticide by any method of application not prohibited by the labeling?

Section 2(ee) of Federal Insecticide Fungicide and Rodenticide Act allows a federally registered pesticide product to be applied by any method of application not prohibited by the labeling unless the labeling specifically states that the product may be applied only by the methods specified on the labeling.

Note for antimicrobial pesticides targeted against human pathogens, it is unlawful for any person selling or distributing these products to advertise uses permitted by FIFRA 2(ee).

The basis for this exception from following pesticide labeling can be found under section 2(ee) of the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act. Any person can make a recommendation under FIFRA section 2(ee). Bulletins dealing with use of a pesticide on a pest not labeled are often distributed by extension services, universities and others and according to EPA " FIFRA section 2(ee) bulletins may be distributed by virtually any means; i.e., through extension personnel, industry representatives, at the point of sale, displayed with the product, or downloaded off the Internet, provided the bulletin is factually correct and conforms to the restrictions of section 2 (ee)."

(Survey Continued)

Highlighted Recommendations

Keep reaching out. While the primary target of the survey was the AERF email subscribers, the link was available in other locations as well. A good amount of respondents indicated that they are “not” supporters of AERF at this time (e.g. subscribe to email list, Facebook page, updates, etc.). This suggests that while we did go outside of the target audience, these “non-AERF supporters” received the link from a related source (e.g. CAIP, FAPMS, website, etc.) and *should* be a supporter. AERF should continue and strengthen, where possible, their attempts to recruit new supporters.

You’re doing a good job! Keep it up. Consider ways to either add benefits to supporters or better advertise the ones you have. While most respondents are very happy with AERF and report that “nothing” could be done to better meet their needs, some feel that there could be more updates and others would like to see more benefits. It’s probably a matter of advertising the kinds of services and products that AERF does already offer. Consider utilizing traditional and social media sources for examples of “success stories” (e.g. YouTube videos, articles on assisting state projects, graduate student work, etc.)

Keep talking about NPDES and EPA. When asked what topics they would like to hear more about in the future from AERF, 62% responded that NPDES matters would be the best topic. This was followed by EPA regulations, relevant legislation and calls-to-action, and information regarding the Endangered Species Act. These regulatory polices have a long background and a lot of technical data. AERF can help fill the gap by keeping people informed in a way that is easy-to-use, understandable, and incredibly useful.

Keep your hand on the pulse. Of those AERF products, services and benefits rated “most valuable,” most respondents reported that timely & important information was the top choice, followed by calls-to-action. It is likely that stakeholders are too busy in their routines to closely follow legislative action or changing regulations; many of these people suggest that they depend on AERF to help keep them updated and in the loop.

Consider more BMP handbook-like publications. Stakeholders demonstrated a high level of awareness of many AERF resources, and the most utilized resource was the BMP handbook. This suggests that the technical publication filled a gap and can be utilized by a broad and diverse audience.

Strongly consider moving to the inclusion of non-plant invasive species. When asked their opinion on expanding the AERF focus from plants to include broader aquatic invasive species issues, a majority of respondents indicated that they supported the change, followed by “maybe.” Very few did not think it was a good idea. The tide of recent efforts to capture public and policy-makers attention has tended to include non-plant invasive species as well as plant species. This broadening of scope could increase AERF stakeholders to include an even more diverse group, to include those more involved with prevention and education (than management).

Email updates are good. If anything, send more. The amount of AERF emails was rated as “sufficient” by a strong majority of respondents, followed by “not frequent enough.” The content of the AERF emails was rated as relevant & interesting most of the time by a strong majority, followed by relevant & interesting sometimes. This suggests that the frequency as well as the content of your email communications with stakeholders is working well.

Keep it up: Facilitating and conducting research is a useful & positive effort. Sixty-one percent (n=216) indicated that relevant research was among the most useful information. Also, a primary reason for stakeholders visiting the AERF website was when they were seeking information and research.

Address stakeholders concerns about regulations and economics. A strong majority of respondents indicated that the regulatory environment was the most important issue facing the industry, followed by concerns about the economy/funding and regulations affecting business. In order to serve that liaison role and provide necessary and salient services, AERF should let stakeholders know that they are being heard and work towards addressing the issues.

Address the economics question head on: Who should pay for invasive species management? Many stakeholders indicated that the private sector should not be responsible for managing invasive species. If that is the case, what are possible solutions for funding shortages given the economic climate? Further research or collaborative efforts could be initiated to explore funding solutions with AERF stakeholders, many of whom are key players in the field.

Keep communicating; they are listening. These stakeholders attend conferences and meetings, they read newsletters and magazines for information, and also look to the web for information. It is suggested that AERF continue to maintain a strong web presence, which includes regular maintenance of the website (and associated content), Facebook page, as well as the newsletter and email ListServe. AERF could try to strengthen communications in social media sites that stakeholders are using (in particular YouTube and LinkedIn). YouTube can be an excellent way to feature short PSA-type videos that are relevant to aquatic invasive species management. This also allows more “sharing” of information via stakeholder websites and networks.

While there can be challenges to communicating with an older demographic utilizing relatively new technology (e.g. social media), and the majority of AERF stakeholder respondents were above 40, they are highly educated and fairly active with Internet tools (particularly Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn).

Keep attending & facilitating events. Respondents were asked if they had attended any AERF-affiliated events in the past five years. Almost half had attended a Regional chapter of APMS, followed by APMS, an aquatic invasive species seminar, a research/field trip.

Respect the diversity of your stakeholders. The organizational structure was fairly evenly split between the private sector and public entities, which suggests that with such diversity and differences in organizational structure, AERF must be cautious in making assumptions and general statements about or to their stakeholders. Indeed, this appears to be a fairly diverse group of stakeholders, which suggests that AERF has a strong foundation and great possibilities for the future.

(Plant Camp continued)

This type of cooperation has been a tremendous help in stretching dollars and enabling us to continue to provide a quality experience for participating teachers, even during a time of serious budget cuts.

Generous support from the Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Foundation (AERF), combined with an in-kind contribution from Boggy Creek Airboats, made it possible to cover the charter cost for two extra-large 14-passenger air boats, allowing us to provide teachers with a first-hand look at a serious hydrilla infestation on Lake Toho. According to workshop evaluations, the field trip is the single most effective means for changing attitudes about the need to control invasive plants. Additional partnering organizations for PLANT CAMP 2012 included the Florida Aquatic Plant Management Society (FAPMS), Mid-South APMS, the national APMS, and United Phosphorus, Inc. In-kind sponsors included Boggy Creek Airboats, Kanapaha Botanical Gardens, UF-IFAS Osceola County Cooperative Extension Office, and the Cabot Lodge.

Participants continue to be greatly appreciative of the extra support and level of commitment from professionals in the invasive plant management arena and are responding with similar dedication toward teaching the topic in the classroom. With such strong community support, UF-IFAS CAIP will continue to provide invasive plant learning opportunities for teachers, as well as hands-on materials and curricula. As one teacher said in her post-workshop evaluation, *“I am leaving today feeling very prepared to educate my students and co-workers on what I have learned these past few days.”*

For more information about the Florida Invasive Plant Education Initiative or PLANT CAMP, contact Amy Richard arich@ufl.edu.

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BIOLOGY AND CONTROL OF AQUATIC PLANTS



A Best Management Practices Handbook

Lyn A. Getty, William T. Haller and Marc Reiland, editors

Sponsorship

The AERF respectfully requests that you consider sponsorship. AERF will continue to work on your behalf, and as a member, you will greatly benefit from our work on regulatory and research aspects of aquatic plant management. With changes in the regulatory environment now and in the future, it is essential to be involved and to support all the hard work of your AERF associates.

Please contact Carlton Layne for information on how you can best participate.

The AERF Mission

The Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Foundation supports research and development that provides strategies and techniques for the environmentally sound management, conservation, and restoration of aquatic ecosystems. Our research provides the basis for the effective control of nuisance and invasive aquatic and wetland plants and algae.

Strategic Goals

- Provide the public information concerning the benefits and value of conserving aquatic ecosystems including the aquatic use of herbicides and algaecides in the aquatic environment.
- Provide information and resources to assist regulatory agencies and other entities making decisions that impact aquatic plant management.
- Fund research in applied aquatic plant management at major universities.

Upcoming Meetings

February 4-7, 2013 WSSA: Baltimore, MD
March 3-6, 2013 Midwest APMS: Cleveland, OH
March 25-27, 2013 Western APMS: Coeur d'Alene, ID
July 13-17, 2012 APMS: San Antonio, TX

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