

# PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

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It is a genuine pleasure to come before you today, at our Aquatic Plant Management Society's first truly international meeting. This meeting was first suggested by George Bowes of the University of Florida. At several Board meetings we discussed the pros and cons of this large-scale endeavor, and concluded that few single actions by APMS could so clearly fit the mandate adopted by our founding members. We are joined to "assist in promoting management of aquatic vegetation, to encourage scientific research, to promote university scholarships and to extend and develop public interest in the movement."

Many of you remember our "bi-national" meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, in 1985, but this is the first serious global effort that our organization has conducted. The 1982 European Weed Research Society (EWRS) meeting in Novi Sad is the only other international meeting that I have been able to attend, but I assure you it made quite an impression, and I have been talking about it since.

This meeting also continues a trend that has not occurred without some anguish. During the past 31 years, APMS has broadened its base from the good folks in Florida and the Southeast to include representatives from states all over the nation, and nations all over the world. Moving some meeting sites out of the southeastern United States has meant many local Florida residents have not been able to attend. However, we have watched the growth of six regional APMS chapters to fulfill local needs. Twelve years ago, the President of APMS stood before the assembly and noted that moving the meeting locations around the country, or even into different countries, would result in "some individual hardships from time to time." "But," he noted, "if we move about enough we will enhance our stature of being international in scope by making the annual meetings more accessible to more interested potential members. I believe that this is what we must do." I concur, and add that if we can't get to the rest of the world, perhaps periodically we can bring the rest of the world to us. Possibly this meeting will provide sufficient energy to move aquatic plant management into some kind of joint international format.

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## ECONOMIC CONCERNS

I want to come back to the international appeal of this gathering, but before I do, I want to share some concerns I have about the current status of aquatic plant management.

Consider all the changes that have taken place in the past 12 to 24 months. The Berlin Wall is gone, the two Germany's reunited; massive changes in political organization and economy in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, paralleling other changes in many nations of central and southern Europe; and even today, as we speak, our hosts at the Novi Sad EWRS meetings live in a country with political and economic questions far from settled.

Indeed, we have international guests at this meeting that in the past could not have attended, at least not as easily as they may now. Unfortunately, we also have individuals that would have given anything to have been able to attend, but could not. The turmoil and economic hardships that exist in many places today are a very real part of international meetings.

Like all processes of change, the very fact that things are different seems to provide opportunity for new and improved working relations among many countries. New freedoms and less philosophically antagonistic economies should mean better chances for us; chances to learn more about aquatic plant management in different countries, chances to meet people with different experiences than our own, chances to put cooperative programs into place and truly internationalize aquatic plant management.

But therein lies the rub; at the very time when the wealth of information matches up with the wealth of opportunity, the wealth of our country is getting harder to find. Today's tough economic conditions are not conducive to expansion of research, development of new equipment, new products, or even of new contacts at international meetings.

## TWO BIGGEST PROBLEMS

I see our two challenges being a shortage of non-federal program dollars and the continuing need to educate the public about aquatic plant management tools and benefits.

The profitability of our business will to a large extent be determined by how we handle state and national economic problems. California is currently \$11 billion dollars in debt, and has been operating without a budget since 1 July (first IOUs since Depression, greater current debt than total budget

25 years ago); the State of Florida has cut \$150 million in funds available to the University of Florida in the past two years. These are just two examples; there are, unfortunately, many more.

While we appear to be universally short of money, public perception of the benefits of aquatic plant management is not as evenly distributed.

Much of publicly funded, operational aquatic plant management is "secondary" to the public's stated concerns. Now please don't overreact; I'm not saying we are any kind of second-class act, it's just that many of us in this room are in the business of reducing negative impacts caused in some manner by aquatic plants, and these actions are not usually taken unless some "primary" resource is being affected. In other words, we manage vegetation to enhance some other activity: to improve fishing access, to increase drinking water supplies, to improve drainage efficiency, to reduce discomfort to swimmers, to improve fishing, *etc.* The public's attention is on what they "perceive" to be the primary activity; we frequently operate in the background.

Our business does include some "primary" activities, but they have not been a major focus of our organization. Aquatic plant production and sales for water gardens and habitat improvement are closer to "primary" activities in the public's view, although habitat restoration is also often a secondary consideration, secondary to the primary goal of increasing biodiversity or populations of waterfowl or something similar.

I am very pleased that Mr. Don Bryne, a commercial provider of aquatic plants, will be talking at 4:00 pm today about "The Aquatic Plant Industry, an Opportunity for International Cooperation." With our organization's historic focus on reducing populations of aquatic plants, we have had little motivation to expand into areas of more "primary" interest. Indeed, our Society's original name was the Hyacinth Control Society, expanded in 1976 to reflect expanding interests.

I believe this society should expand into some of these areas of primary interest. But I didn't make the distinction between "primary" and "secondary" interest to increase membership of the society, I made it to try to simplify in my mind the relationships between global changes in social structure and economics and the field of aquatic plant management.

I would expect impacts to primary aquatic plant activities from our nation's and many of our state's economic woes to be fairly straightforward. Purchase of aquatic plants for water garden use most probably comes from discretionary income, and discretionary income appears to be what will most likely be decreased, if the growing U.S. deficit is to be brought under control.

What about secondary activities of aquatic plant management? This, I think, is much tougher to figure out. On the

one hand, increasing populations put more and more pressure on drinking water supplies, recreation resources, and agricultural production, with its contribution of fertilizer and other compounds in return flows to rivers and lakes. All these increase the pressure to effectively manage aquatic resources.

On the other hand, weak economies and increasing regulatory restrictions reduce our ability to meet the population-dependent challenges just listed. Regulatory action alone could merit an international meeting. I wanted to give our international visitors a brief review of the resource laws we operate under, but it takes too long, it isn't that much fun, and there are plenty of people that can do a better job than I can. Instead, I will simply state that this nation has not yet invented the economic mechanism to provide for scientifically justified and politically acceptable social use of shared resources. We know that the benefits are not in simple proportion to the mountains of legislation and regulation being produced, and we all know of resources receiving too little protection.

But where is the money to implement the federal and state requirements? It has been a painful lesson, and its not very popular to agree with anything that comes out of Washington, DC, but it appears that most publicly funded programs will depend on either a healthy economy or continually increasing taxes. Long-term success will depend on enough money to implement successful programs. In other words, long-term ecological welfare depends, to some extent, on long-term economic welfare.

Now, I couldn't possibly close without mentioning how ironic it is that I find myself as President of the Aquatic Plant Management Society, giving the Presidential Address at our Society's largest gathering of the various entities and individuals interested in aquatic plant biology and management. The irony stems from my place in the structure of things aquatic.

I represent an irrigation district in the driest agricultural area in North America, and possibly the driest agricultural area in the western hemisphere. Our average rainfall is under 3 in. (76 mm). We are somewhat better known for our wildflowers than for our wetlands.

Our second principal unique feature is that the Imperial Valley is located below sea level, and yet we are a gravity flow irrigation district.

Our third unique feature is that all domestic, agricultural, and industrial water in the Imperial Valley is supplied by canals from the Colorado River. We use about 20% of the entire flow of the Colorado River, the single biggest user of the most heavily allocated river in the western U.S.

And if that combination wasn't bizarre enough, we have the largest, biological-control-based, flowing-water, hydrilla eradication program in the world.

The California Department of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Imperial County, and my

organization, Imperial Irrigation District, are in the sixth year of an operational hydrilla eradication program in the irrigated desert region of southern California. The introduction of over 120,000 triploid grass carp over six years, together with chemical applications in small ponds, concrete lining for water management efficiency, and a tremendous amount of physical labor, has resulted in reduction of hydrilla from 192 km (120 miles) of canal to a current level of 4.5 km (2.8 miles) of canal.

The cost of the program has been \$5,300,000 to date, but the Imperial Valley produces a billion dollars worth of agricultural products each year and restriction of water flow has serious economic consequences.

Well, what does all this mean to you? We have an eradication program, and eradication programs are not in vogue for most of the world's aquatic plant management efforts. And, we have an eradication program based substantially on biological control, not a typical use of biological control.

If all these features are so atypical of aquatic plant management projects throughout the world, what's going on in California that the rest of you can learn from? I think we are a microcosm, or perhaps a megacosm, of what will happen in other locations as pressure on water resources continues to increase.

Water resources are scarce in the western U.S. and more money will be made available to ensure that these resources are free of aquatic plant problems. As unusual as my type of aquatic plant management program used to be, I think it will become more common in the future.

### WESTERN U.S. PATTERNS

There are other aspects of what we do in the western U.S. that may have a larger impact on other parts of this country than you might expect. Our irrigation systems, water delivery systems, state and federal projects are quite different than water projects in the eastern U.S., right? Well, not always. Part of the battle over allocation of water for irrigated agriculture in California stems from a prevalent voting system for state and federal irrigation districts; instead of one person-one vote, they have one acre-one vote, or 0.4 ha-one vote for those of you from progressive nations that use the metric system. The largest land-holding economic interests are free to make decisions that can be catastrophic to people at the other end of the economic scale.

Peculiar to California? Not quite. I'm now reading from a 1991 paper titled Property and Water Institutions in California:

"...the property-weighted electoral system has spread eastward across the country. It has caught on in

Florida, most interestingly in the example of the Reedy Creek Improvement District. Property, not people, votes in Reedy Creek, which has exactly the same boundaries as Walt Disney World. The five supervisors who run the district are elected on a one acre-one vote basis; since the charter specifies that all directors must be landowners, chosen nominees are deeded five acres of land by Disney. RCID was created in 1967 by an act of the Florida legislature. The board may issue municipal bonds, contract with the Federal government, build roads, operate an airport, exercise the power of eminent domain. The Reedy Creek Improvement District is listed in the telephone book under 'Walt Disney World'. It also appears on Form 10-K of the Securities Exchange Commission as a 'governmental unit of the State of Florida'. It is one governmental unit that is listed in the assets category on a corporate financial statement." (Goodall, Merrill, Property and Water Institutions in California, 1991)

So you see, it's not just Californians that you get showing up here in Florida every so often. More and more you may get to live with our peculiar water management institutions. They were designed for limited water supplies and they seem to be in vogue.

### CLOSING POINTS

Let me close by summarizing what I think this meeting means. I mentioned the economic difficulty faced by many international friends that wanted badly to attend this meeting. The Aquatic Plant Management Society has done what we felt we could to help where possible and where the need was obvious. Know then, that as small an organization as we are, and as insignificant a role as we may play in the global perspective of world relations, we nevertheless chose to act as if we were significant, as if we could make a difference, as if the individual relations could be cornerstones to international bridges.

Like never before in the history of our business, our economies are tied together, our futures are tied together, and we are all sitting here together. Your officers are doing everything possible to provide these historic opportunities, but you are the opportunities—take advantage of them, and one day you'll look back on this and know you played a part.

Well, here's an opportunity to learn and grow. You came to this meeting because you had specific interests, ranging from the scientific to the sublime. The memories I carry with me from the international meeting I attended are of the people, and the places, and of course, the papers. But of these three, I believe the people come first. Next year in Charleston, SC,

we can go back to our comfortable relationships with the folks we know the best. This year let's shake it up a bit. Be bold, be daring, try something you've never done before. If nothing else comes to mind, take a Californian to lunch!