

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

S. JOSEPH ZOLCZYNSKI¹

Good morning, and welcome to the thirty-fourth meeting of the Aquatic Plant Management Society and the sixth meeting of the Texas Aquatic Plant Management Society. This occasion also marks the second joint meeting of the parent society and one of the chapters.

I would like to extend a special welcome to those attending their first meeting of the Aquatic Plant Management Society. And to long-time members, I would, as many presidents have in the past, ask that you take the time to meet and greet each new member you see.

It gives me a great deal of pride and pleasure to stand before you as the President of the Aquatic Plant Management Society. I would be remiss, however, if I did not also acknowledge the anxiety involved in speaking before such a gathering of distinguished and accomplished individuals involved in the aquatic plant science discipline. This time allotted the President for an address is a wonderful opportunity not often available to a speaker. The subject of the address is left solely to the discretion of the president. Nothing would please me more than to be able to give an address that is inspirational or profound in nature, possibly predict the future in aquatic plant management or prescribe a new and exciting direction for this Society to take as we near the next millennia. However after considerable thought, I believe that instead I would like to use the time allotted the president to reflect on my experiences in the Aquatic Plant Management Society and my views on why this scientific organization is so successful in its effort to provide benefits to plant managers like me and to agencies such as the one that employs me.

Before I do this, perhaps first I should briefly describe my state's aquatic plant management program and also how I came to be a member of this organization. The State of Alabama's aquatic plant management program is a small one by any measure. We have only two full-time employees and a secretary who devotes approximately one-fifth of her working time to aquatic plant management. Our lead agency is the Game and Fish Division of the state. Our main scope of responsibility is not plant management but the management of wildlife and fish populations in Alabama. My education and work experience, prior to becoming the state's aquatic plant manager, was in fisheries and not plant management. So, as you can imagine, in 1980 when we began our aquatic plant management program in Alabama's Game and Fish Division, we had an inexperienced staff with a great need for guidance and education in the aquatic plant management discipline.

¹ Aquatic Plant Manager, State of Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Game and Fish Division, P.O. Box 245, Spanish Fort, AL 36527. Presented at the 34th Annual Meeting of the Aquatic Plant Management Society, July 1994 in San Antonio, Texas.

When I took the job of plant manager for the State of Alabama, I was not the first but rather the second person to have the job. The other person, however, had worked for only a few weeks before leaving the position. Shortly after taking the job, I found a small cardboard box in the office containing all the files that had been accumulated by my predecessor in those few weeks.

In that box were many of the items you would expect to find, such as plant identification books, maps of the state's waterways, preliminary surveys of the aquatic plants, and information about equipment that would be needed to manage plants in Alabama. But I also found one other item in the box. This last item, which was probably the most important thing in that box, was an announcement for the 1980 Aquatic Plant Management Society meeting in Sarasota, Florida. In the corner of that announcement written in pencil was a note that said, "Important group, plan to attend." I took that advice and have been the beneficiary ever since.

When I became a member of APMS in 1980, I joined a group that had objectives which were established, in the beginning, as the Hyacinth Control Society and have remained virtually unchanged to this day. They are very simply stated: assist in promoting management of aquatic vegetation, exchange scientific information, promote university scholarship, and develop public interest in plant management. To accomplish these objectives, the Society adopted plans that are similar to those of other scientific societies. These include: having an annual meeting to review the work of others, encouraging the participation of college students, publishing a journal for review, and publishing a newsletter for the members. These are all annual tasks or goals that help us accomplish our objectives. The value of each of these tasks can easily be evaluated using the parameters analysts use to evaluate programs or businesses.

However, today I want to evaluate our success in accomplishing the Society's stated objectives using my own experiences and criteria. The criteria are simple: concern for people and the environment, diversity, balance, and a willingness to change. Let me examine each one of these as I perceive they have been helpful to me, and I hope other plant managers like me.

The Aquatic Plant Management Society's objectives, in my mind, speak directly to concern for people and the environment. Each one of the objectives, in one way or another, suggests that we should be educating people. This indicates a concern for education and development of students, continuing education for those already working in plant management, concern for managers' safety as we work in the field. Concern for the environment, so that everyone involved in plant management is equipped with the proper knowledge to enable them to accomplish their task of plant management in a way that benefits aquatic organisms, the aquatic environment, and the users of those resources.

It didn't take long for me to recognize that this organization and its members were concerned with the needs of plant managers. At my first APMS meeting, I expected to review presentations. Presentations that I knew from the program would be valuable, and possibly even make a few personal contacts that would benefit my agency and our work. When I arrived, I knew only one person; but it seemed as if everyone else at the first meeting I attended already knew each other. I wasn't lonely for long. Everywhere I went during that first meeting in Sarasota, people kept coming up to me and inquiring about who I was and what my interests in plant management were. I hadn't even noticed that my name tag was a different color from the rest of the members. This small detail, identifying new members, and the concern that the "old timers" expressed for our aquatic plant management problems in Alabama had a positive and lasting influence on how I viewed this organization. People were offering suggestions or inquiring about what small bit of information or insight I might have that could be of benefit to them or to this group. Concern for all of the people involved in plant management, the environment, and the users of that aquatic resource was important for success in the past and will always be a necessary ingredient for the success of this Society.

Diversity. We are a society with a relatively narrow scope of interest. That being the management of aquatic plants. The scope may be narrow, but the people and groups involved are very diverse. Our membership is from private industry, universities, local, state, and federal governmental agencies, lake property association members, angler groups, and others. Our membership is involved in hands-on field operations to manage plants, research on aquatic plants, teaching, selling products used in plant management, administering governmental programs, and representing people that utilize our nation's and the world's aquatic resources. This diversity means that a member can attend our annual meeting and personally meet with or review the presentations of individuals involved in all aspects of aquatic plant management.

I've already discussed the value of diversity to the Society and the value of this diversity to the plant manager like me, but diversity is only of value if there is balance in this diversity. A balance in the diversity of the presentations available for review at the annual meeting. A balance in the membership among researchers, applicators, administrators, industry representatives, and individuals concerned with the use of our aquatic resources. A geographical balance in meeting locations. A balance in the needs of the parent organization and the needs of the chapters. In short, a balance in the influence that each one of these varied groups has on the direction of our Society.

The final criteria that I have used through the years to measure the value of this organization is our willingness to change. We have been changing and evolving, probably since the day we were founded as the Hyacinth Control Society. We certainly have been changing since I joined in 1980. In the beginning this was an organization concerned with the management of one plant in one area of the country. We now have an international membership and are concerned with the problems presented by and management of a large number of plants.

One recent change that I believe has been of value is the initiation of joint meetings between the Aquatic Plant Management Society and a regional chapter. The joint meeting certainly has advantages for both groups. The most obvious, of course, is with local arrangements. People in Texas can do a much better job of taking care of local arrangements for a meeting in San Antonio than anyone from another region. Another major advantage that joint meetings provide both groups is the prospect of increasing the membership through exposure to people who have never had the opportunity to attend their meeting. I wouldn't suggest that all future meetings utilize the joint format; but whenever possible and agreeable to the local chapter, the Aquatic Plant Management Society should explore the joint format.

Another change that I have seen is the evolution of how we promote university scholarship. In the past, students have been encouraged to attend this meeting through a student paper contest. A program that has tremendous value, and I am sure will continue and grow. The change that I hope to see soon is the ability for the Student Endowment to fund student participation entirely. And, hopefully, the Endowment will be in a position in the not too distant future to actually award scholarships to deserving students in the field of aquatic plant science.

Please accept my review of the Aquatic Plant Management Society in the spirit it was intended: a thank you to all of the members, who, from the beginning, have worked so hard to shape this Society into one that provides tremendous benefits to the plant manager. And as a suggestion that we continue to show true concern for people who work in this discipline and the environment that they are charged with managing. I hope we will continue to encourage a diverse membership and maintain a balance within that diverse group. And, finally, accept and encourage change as the needs of the membership change.

Thank you for the honor and opportunity to serve the Aquatic Plant Management Society as your president.