

Presidential Address

STEVEN J. DE KOZLOWSKI¹

There is a saying “Change is inevitable, but progress is optional”. There is no disputing the fact that this has been a year of change. Some of these changes we have brought on ourselves and are good because they improve our society, but some have been thrust upon us and pose a serious challenge to our profession. How we as a professional society deal with these changing times, I think, will determine whether our profession advances or not.

Often change takes us full circle, so we end up where we began. That is sort of the course we have taken with the restructuring of our secretary and treasurer duties. Prior to 1982 this Society had a separate Secretary and Treasurer; however, for the past 12 years they were merged into one office, the Secretary-Treasurer. That worked well as long as we had an individual who was willing and able to perform all the duties of that position, but when Bill Rushing decided to step down, it became apparent that that position was too heavy a burden for any one person to handle. So the Board decided to split it out again to separate offices. For the past year, we have tested this arrangement with Randy Stocker serving as Treasurer and Wendy Andrew as Acting Secretary, and contrary to the fears of some, including myself, it has worked very well; despite the fact that they were located on opposite coasts. Based on this success, we are going to recommend that the By-Laws be revised to provide a permanent division of these offices.

Along with that change, which requires significant modifications to the by-laws, we have also decided to “clean-up” the by-laws to provide greater consistency and clarity. While these changes will not alter the basic purpose and functions of the Society, they should improve services to the membership and ensure the financial security of the Society. You will be voting on these changes at the business meeting later this morning, and I encourage you to support them.

We have made progressive changes in another very important area as well. Quite frankly this Society, while vigilant in pursuing most of our objectives, has not aggressively pursued one of our basic objectives, that is to “Extend and develop public interest in, and understanding of, aquatic plant management problems and solutions.” In other words, public education. I see this one objective as the most important of all because the public’s understanding and acceptance of managing aquatic plants will ultimately determine the fate of our profession.

This year we have taken one big step toward what I hope will be an ongoing public education effort. On June 16th I

met with Helen Sevier, CEO and President of BASS, the Bass Anglers Sportsmen Society, to sign a Cooperative Agreement and Memorandum of Understanding between our societies. That document establishes a foundation from which we can build a meaningful relationship with bass fishermen, a group which has long had a misperception of aquatic plant management and aquatic plant managers.

As one bass fisherman put it to me the other day “You just kill plants” . . . “You *just* kill plants.” He didn’t mean any offense by it, but what I think he meant was that is *all* we care about . . . killing plants. What he didn’t know was that most public aquatic plant managers have a deep appreciation for the aquatic environment, that most have degrees in biology, many have graduate degrees in botany, fisheries biology, or ecology. What he didn’t know was that we do what we do because we care about the environment. What he didn’t know was that we care enough about the environment to commit the time and expense needed to come here, to these meetings, to learn how we can perform our jobs in the most effective and environmentally sound manner possible. We need to make these points clear to all water users, but especially to fishermen.

Fishermen, especially tournament bass fishermen, are a very high profile group, they are well organized, and they care very much about the aquatic environment. For many, their livelihood depends upon the health of our public waters. So their perception of the impact of aquatic plant management to the health of the sport fishery should be important to us. BASS has in excess of 640,000 members. They are a major source of fishing and environmental information for fishermen. They publish four different magazines, a newspaper, numerous books, and have a cable television show. To paraphrase a famous commercial “When BASS speaks, fishermen listen.” So it is critical that we have a good working relationship with BASS if we have any hope of educating the fishing public.

We have been working hard for the past two years to open up better lines of communication with anglers through BASS. And as a culmination of that effort we signed the Memorandum of Understanding. The MOU recognizes the expertise of each society, identifies areas of mutual agreement, and specifies activities that each society can perform to improve cooperation and minimize unnecessary conflicts. The essence of the MOU is education and communication. Education of our individual memberships to the needs of the other, and improved communication between the societies to foster an atmosphere of cooperation. It is our Society’s responsibility to encourage all aquatic plant managers to solicit input from and to try to address the needs of sportfishermen in the development of all aquatic plant management plans.

During the press conference that followed the signing, I was very impressed with the comments by Helen Sevier and

¹Chairman, South Carolina Aquatic Plant Management Council and Manager, Aquatic Plant Management Program, Water Resources Division, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, 1201 Main Street, Suite 1100, Columbia, SC 29201. Presented at the 35th Annual Meeting of The Aquatic Plant Management Society, July 10, 1995 in Seattle, Washington.

Bruce Shupp, their new Conservation Director. They very clearly stated that exotic species like hydrilla should not be transported from one lake to another and that fishermen should take care to remove plants from their boats and trailers before leaving a lake. They also stated that although aquatic plants provide good fish habitat and are good for fishing, fishermen need to understand that some aquatic plants, especially exotics, need to be managed to prevent problems. These are reasonable people who share our mutual concern for a healthy aquatic environment, and I am convinced that a strong partnership with BASS that extends to their State Federations and to our regional chapters will go a long way to avoiding conflicts between resource managers and fishermen in the future.

As I mentioned earlier, some change is by choice and some has been thrust upon us. By now, I'm sure that everyone is well aware of the possible loss of the Corps of Engineers Aquatic Plant Control Program. If the Senate follows the actions of the House and the Administration by eliminating this important program, it would mean the end of all matching funds to the states. These funds support one-half of all control operations on public waters, and virtually all of it is focused on controlling the growth and spread of hydrilla and other exotic species. It would also mean the termination of the Corps' Aquatic Plant Control Research Program at the Waterways Experiment Station in Vicksburg and Lewisville.

Over the years, this program has provided a coordinated nationwide study of the biology, ecology and control of nuisance aquatic plant species, focusing mainly on the top three - hydrilla, Eurasian watermilfoil, and water hyacinth. Results from their research efforts have helped aquatic plant managers throughout the U.S. to more effectively manage aquatic plant problems in their region of the country. I know, because I have applied several techniques developed from their research efforts to control hydrilla and water hyacinths in South Carolina . . . and they work.

Without the Corps' assistance we would not have implemented the nation's largest sterile grass carp stocking project in South Carolina. To date we have stocked over 650,000 sterile grass carp in the Santee Cooper lakes to help control 45,000 acres of hydrilla; the single largest infestation in the country. We have been able to successfully control its growth in 22% of all infested waters for four consecutive years and expect to see a significant long-term decline in total coverage during the next two years. The success of this large-scale integrated management effort has been due to the research and funding assistance provided by the Corps' APC Program. Other states have also benefitted from this program. Florida, Alabama, and Texas to name a few, and even right here in Washington State, where hydrilla was just discovered for the first time this year, the Corps is helping to find management solutions.

The benefits from a national aquatic plant control research program and a national program that matches the state's efforts to control the impacts and spread of noxious aquatic plants are tremendous. Nuisance aquatic plants do not recognize state borders. Without this program there is little doubt in my mind that aquatic plant problems in public waters will become more severe, spread to other regions of the country more rapidly, and cause major environmental

and economic impacts to our nation's waterways. But I'm preaching to the choir. You know the benefits, you know the impacts. So why am I telling you all this?

First, because for those who are not aware of the program, you need to understand why your society has taken such an active role in educating Congress on the importance of this program. I was very pleased with the rapid response of our membership to our action alert earlier this year. This Society has pulled together on this one issue like no other that I'm aware to get the word out on Capitol Hill that aquatic plant management is a nationwide problem needing a national focus. Dr. John Zirschky, Acting Assistant Secretary of the Army, informed my Director at a partnering meeting in Atlanta that he had never received more mail over such a small program before in his life. We have written letters. We have made phone calls. We have submitted testimony. We have been heard. Whether Congress pays attention or not is beyond our control.

The second reason for telling you all this is because the loss of the APC Program would mean that our society would have to play a much larger and active role in assisting states with management information and technical expertise. Think about it. Without the Corps' APC program, we are the only national organization that is focused on the management of nuisance aquatic plants. Therefore, it would be our obligation to help establish national research priorities, assist in the coordination of research, provide technical expertise, and facilitate the exchange of information among our membership.

No other professional society has as many scientists focused on the management of aquatic plants. Therefore, our annual meetings would provide a perfect opportunity for researchers to meet with resource managers and industry representatives to discuss practical research needs and identify possible funding sources. We already provide technical expertise on a limited basis. Just yesterday, the Washington State Department of Ecology selected a group of our members to form a Hydrilla Task Force to help them find a solution to their recent hydrilla problem. The Society may need to form a special committee to address similar requests in the future.

Information exchange is what we do best and have done for the past 35 years through presentations at our annual meetings, publication of research papers in our "Journal of Aquatic Plant Management", and the printing of timely articles in our newsletter. We need to continue these efforts. However, we need to do more. We also need to provide a greater opportunity for our members to network among themselves, especially during these rapidly changing times. This can best be accomplished through the use of a comprehensive membership directory that includes not only names and addresses, but phone numbers, fax numbers, e-mail addresses, and keywords related to our professional expertise. We have started such a directory but we need your input to make it complete. I urge you all to provide this information to the registration desk during this meeting, so we can publish a useful directory this coming year.

"Change is inevitable, progress is optional". There is no doubt based on activities in Congress and in State Houses across the country that the world as we know it is changing

dramatically. Once stable federal sources of funds for research and control are disappearing; whole organizations that we once turned to for help are being eliminated; and many of our members and friends may not be at this meeting next year because they will be in another line of work. Yes, these are times of great change, but fortunately we are prepared as a society to cope with these changes.

We are a very diverse organization and in that diversity is our strength and our future. Just like a diverse stock portfolio provides economic strength and stability over time, the diversity of our membership will provide strength and stability in our Society and profession in the long run. But it all depends on how we react to this change as to whether our profession simply changes, or in fact makes progress. Do we quarrel among ourselves, make unfounded accusations, and

become divided over apparent misunderstandings, or do we all pull together, pool our resources, and unite in a common cause. Do we allow public perception and ignorance to dictate our fate, or do we become more proactive as a Society, serve as advocates of our profession and advance public education. The choice is ours.

Our profession, and this Society, is facing significant changes in the way we do business, but I am optimistic about our future and convinced that with your continued support and participation, The Aquatic Plant Management Society can provide the leadership that is needed, not just to weather the inevitable changes, but to provide meaningful advancements in our profession.

Thank you for your support and thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve as your president.