

Minutes of the EMC General Meeting September 14, 2011

Voting Members Present (11): Eric Banford, Spring Buck, Kenny Christianson, Brian Eden, Martha Ferger, Katie Kelly, Dan Lamb, Jim McGarry, Kristine Shaw, Gary Stewart, Lucia Tyler

Voting Members Excused (3): Sarah Adams, Steve Nicholson, Roger Yonkin

Non-Voting Member Present: Dooley Kiefer

Guests Present: Roxy Johnston, Holly Menninger, Craig Schutt (+ WHCU reporter)

Staff Present: Scott Doyle, Kathy Wilsea

Call to Order – The meeting was called to order by Vice Chair Dan Lamb at 7:04 p.m.

Privilege of the Floor – There were no visitors who wished to speak under Privilege of the Floor.

Changes to the Agenda and Approval of Minutes – Agenda items will be addressed in a different order, starting with the Hydrilla topic. The minutes of July 13, 2011 were accepted without change. Final minutes are available on the EMC webpage: www.tompkins-co.org/emc.

Hydrilla Verticillata and the Cayuga Inlet – Guests Holly Menninger (NY Invasive Species Research Institute at Cornell), Roxy Johnston (City of Ithaca Drinking Water Plant), and Craig Schutt (Tompkins County Soil & Water Conservation District) were introduced. Holly began by saying the Invasive Species Research Institute was established in 2005 to connect research organizations with the NYS natural resources board. She is involved with management and outreach. Craig said SWCD became involved and is handling the processes for obtaining permits from DEC. Roxy said the City of Ithaca became involved because DEC doesn't have a mandate on dealing with invasive plants.

Holly said Floating Classroom staff found suspicious samples during their trip on 8/4/2011. These were shown to retired Cornell University biology professor Bob Johnson, who was very concerned. This plant is not found around us or in neighboring water bodies. Other occurrences have connection to oceans or are isolated waterbodies. Hydrilla has been in the US since the 1950s, when it was found in Florida and is presumed to have started from an aquarium dump. It is considered a noxious weed in federal classifications, but perhaps can be purchased from aquarium shops on the internet. The identification of hydrilla in Cayuga Inlet set off big alarms. It hitchhikes and grows rapidly. She passed around some pulled samples in sealed plastic bags. The team found rooted samples of hydrilla and identified dense infestations, especially near the Farmers Market docks and in Cascadilla Creek by the Haunt and the Route 13 bridge, as well as in the Cass Park Ditch. They speculate it arrived by boat.

Hydrilla typically has 4 to 8 leaves growing together, and the leaves are of varying lengths. Bob Johnson also examined tubers, which can survive for up to ten years in sediment, and calculated density per square meter. It was determined the infestation began this year, based on the status of the rhizomes, which are cross stems that form above the sediment. There is great potential for plant fragments to spread through boat and trailer traffic. A crew was organized to survey locations in the Inlet, and got to almost 350 spots. Standard practices were used to gather samples. They did not find any densely growing patches outside the Inlet, but did find mats out by the red lighthouse. Wave action and prevailing winds would predominately force fragments back by Stewart Park. Another way hydrilla spreads is by forming turions in the fall, which attach to boats and trailers. Holly has worked with invasive species for three years, and this is one of the worst. But it has been caught early and because of the small area the likelihood of success is higher.

Roxy reported there are about 9 acres of dense beds to deal with, and this infestation is considered an early detection. California's eradication program quarantines an area as soon as hydrilla is identified. We have no official way to quarantine. There is no selective biological control, we can't drain the inlet, and are not a candidate for use of sterile grass

carp or benthic barriers that smother a species. The team is examining use of hand harvesting or machine harvesting. In this area, touching the plant produces silt disturbance. Professional harvesters would pull the plants, have them vacuumed up and sent to the wastewater treatment plant for biodigestion, which is a process that produces power. Herbicides are not very toxic to fish. But mats of hydrilla can kill fish because of oxygen deprivation.

Craig said SWCD inquired with DEC about use of herbicide. Unfortunately, such use is subject to a 21-day comment period. Roxy is trying to get signatures of the property owners, which number over 30, so the comment period can be waived. There is also a funding problem. DEC might have \$50,000, which is not enough for first round herbicide treatment. Craig contacted the manufacturer, who acknowledges this is a big deal and is willing to donate \$15,000 worth of the product and come help with application. Holly noted NYS is very strict about herbicide use. Inlet samples indicated this is the monoecious type of hydrilla and would not become resistant to the herbicide. There is no way to run a small sample of the herbicide. Roxy pointed out we are running out of time to use the herbicide. Word is getting out on the need to treat the infestation and gather volunteers. The team is planning ways to contact tourists, landowners, and boaters. Holly noted that Sharon Anderson of Cooperative Extension is willing to post all information. Roxy said State Parks is sharing information, providing wash areas, and hosting a site for training. Holly said the team had volunteers at the Farmers Market and Johnson Boatyard on Labor Day weekend and every weekend since then.

Brian Eden said he understands this is serious, but is trying to be thoughtful. He is concerned about use of chemicals and has checked health advisories posted on the EPA website. The re-registration process for Endothal in 2005 shows some risks, and he read a couple excerpts, noting possible impacts on freshwater invertebrates documented. He is concerned about making a rash decision, and is uncomfortable with supporting use of herbicides. Roxy pointed out that, if left unchecked, the plants can kill, too. Brian said the infestation could also have occurred from migrating waterfowl, which is a likelihood that can occur again, and stressed a need to look at the problem in the long run. Roxy agreed it is probably not a one-off incident and we need to keep checking. There is also a move in the NYS Legislature that would allow DEC to become more responsive. If DEC had a program, we would have known our options the day after hydrilla was identified. Holly noted boats come from all along the East Coast. She feels the infestation came by boat. Herbicide use would only be one tool. This is a contact herbicide, which acts immediately and breaks down in 5 to 7 days. Its use requires a licensed applicator. The Inlet would be closed, and all aspects of the permit are dictated by DEC. Roxy has spoken with Bolton Point management, and is getting information on the half-life of the herbicide. The distance from the work area to Bolton Point intake pipes is over a mile. Before and after tests can check chemical levels. All these conversations have been started. Craig said Bob Johnson thinks we will need to use the herbicide for two consecutive years. DEC has strict water quality standards re kicking up turbidity. Inlet dredging would not address the hydrilla infestation, and Roxy said we should consider the dredging project on hold. It is important to treat this immediately, although herbicide use would also affect other plants.

If the permit is not approved and work does not proceed, the outlook is bad. Bob Johnson feels in 3 to 5 years the Inlet would not be navigable if treatment isn't implemented. It would fill the inlet and go out into the lake. It can grow in water depths up to 20 feet, thrives in low light, and has possibly been growing in a layer below native plants. Funding is needed to proceed. Holly said we need to stop it soon and buy ourselves time to work out a long-term management plan. Craig pointed out that every boat that backs up out of Johnson Boatyard backs into hydrilla and chops it up. Hydrilla has the potential to clog up the channel and have an impact on flooding. Holly stated Florida spends \$10 to 30 million per year just to manage hydrilla, not eradicate it. Holly thinks we have a strong enough native seedbank to be optimistic about how areas wiped out by the herbicide will grow back. The team is getting expert help from the University of Florida and University of California/Davis. Dan Lamb said the Army Corps of Engineers also has an aquatic plant research unit, but it is not currently funded. Some members of Congress are trying to get funding restored. Dan asked if Bolton Point would be able to detect the herbicide if it appeared in concentrations listed in the EPA data, and Craig said Bolton Point says they probably could not detect such low levels. Lucia Tyler asked if hydrilla can plug up water intake pipes, and Roxy said it can, which is why work releases are being requested of landowners within half a mile of Bolton Point. The herbicide is applied through use of submerged releases and hand-held sprays, so is capable of being used in small areas for spot treatments*. Holly said hydrilla is now on all continents except Antarctica, and has natural controls in its native areas, but the natural controls can't survive in our climate. Any barrier for carp or plants would complicate water level issues. The carp also jump, and we don't want them here permanently in the Inlet or the lake.

Roxy reiterated this is a highly invasive plant, and the need to act quickly is urgent. This infestation shows the need for better boating practices long term, and we need to lobby for responsive laws. Holly said many towns in the Adirondacks are passing invasive species laws, and there is also interest on the county level there. Any comments, questions, or offers to

work as volunteers can be made to Roxy (roxannaj@cityofithaca.org or 607-273-4680) or Holly (hlm65@cornell.edu or 607-254-6789). There is a task force training coming up on 9/23 at the Cornell Sailing Center, East Shore Drive. Brian Eden pointed out he doesn't like to rely on vendor information for herbicide data. He understands it is serious, but we need more sources of information.

* Email from Roxy Johnston 9/15/2011: On review today, I learned that the herbicide will actually be applied to the whole inlet, not just onto the dense hydrilla mats. This will insure that all rooted fragments are captured in the treatment. I apologize for any confusion.

Resolution: Reorganization of Membership Seats on the Tompkins County Environmental Management Council – Dan Lamb said all members have had months to review this, and the August workshop was useful. Resolution moved by Katie Kelly, seconded by Gary Stewart. Resolution language was amended through specific voting action. The amended document was moved by Jim McGarry and seconded by Lucia Tyler. If approved by the County Legislature, a phase-in period will be organized. Dooley Kiefer said she felt obliged to share her opinion. EMC had an emphasis on municipalities because municipalities have authority that the County doesn't have in natural resource protection. This reorganization doesn't address that point, and she will oppose it in the Legislature process. Dan said it is not meant to be adversarial, and legislators he has spoken with have supported this change. Kristine Shaw pointed out municipalities need to step up and establish Conservation Advisory Councils or Conservation Boards. Brian Eden said he sees other members support this. He doesn't see opposition from legislators when he interacts with them as an EMC member. He feels the problem is finding volunteers with time to serve, not the structure of the council. Jim McGarry said he does feel a lack of connection, but maybe that is because he is a relatively new member. Dan said less participation, fewer members, and having no liaison from the County Legislature add up to a need to address this as a systemic problem. Vote on the amended document: 9 yes, 1 no (Christianson), 1 abstention (Eden).

Updates: Municipal Reports – Lucia Tyler reported the Town of Ulysses banned gas drilling as part of a zoning modification.

Reports – Staff: Kathy Wilsea said there may be a need for members to reapply for existing seats while the membership modification resolution is examined. If members are asked to reapply, she urged them to respond quickly.

Member Items – Brian said he has met several people who would be interesting speakers for EMC. Dan suggested he submit ideas to the Executive Committee. Dan announced the DEC gas drilling dsGEIS comments are due 12/12 and no extension is expected.

Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned at 9:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy Wilsea, Secretary, Tompkins County Planning Department

Approved by Council on October 12, 2011