

**Lake Gaston Technical Advisory Group - Meeting Minutes**  
**February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2026**  
**10 am – 12 pm**

**Attendance (7 voting members)**

Rob Richardson (NCSU), Rob Emens (NC DEQ), Kirk Rundle (NC WRC), Mark Fowlkes (NC WRC), Dan Michaelson (VA DGIF), Corwin Chamberlain (Dominion Energy), Jeff Zimmer (Stakeholders Board)

**Also Present:**

Jessica Baumann (NCSU), Kara Foley (NCSU), Michael Fisk (NC WRC), Rory Roten (SePRO Corporation) , John Franz (LGA / LGWCC), Wally Sayko (LGA / LGWCC), Josh Simpson (Dominion), David Belkoski (NCWRC), West Bishop (SePRO), Scooter Boham (LGA), Jim Nystrom (LGA), Cliff Johnson (Dominion), Kelsey Roberts (NCWRC)

The annual meeting of the Lake Gaston Technical Advisory Group was held on February 19, 2026 via Zoom.

Jessica Baumann, extension associate for North Carolina State University's Aquatic Plant Management Program (NCSU APM), presented the 2025 aquatic vegetation survey results, 2025 treatment protocols directed at hydrilla and lyngbya, and the 2026 proposed treatment protocols for hydrilla and lyngbya management.

**Overall Monitoring Efforts**

Baumann highlighted the efforts put forth by volunteers of the Lake Gaston Association's Environmental Committee (LGA EC) and researchers from NCSU APM. Overall, there were 556 active survey hours provided by almost 200 volunteers between the dates of August 16<sup>th</sup> and October 29<sup>th</sup> 2025. LGA and NCSU efforts resulted in data collected at 5,938 individual survey points and is comparable to previous survey years.

Vegetation was present at 86% of sites surveyed and species identified were representative of the expected aquatic plant community at Lake Gaston. Emergent species represented the greatest percent of the community (present at 86% of sites), followed by submerged species (present at 43 % of sites), algal species (present at 30% of sites) and floating leaves (present at 17% of sites). Water willow represented the largest percentage of the aquatic plant community, followed by southern naiad and lyngbya. The distribution and abundance of the native submersed species, southern naiad, displayed the greatest increase (11%)

from 2025 survey results. Hydrilla, an invasive species, showed the second greatest increase at 4% from 2025.

## **Monitoring and Treatment Efforts**

### *Hydrilla Management Efforts – Overview*

Following TAG recommendations, 204 acres of hydrilla were targeted for management utilizing chemical control methods in 2025 at sites distributed throughout the system. There were no grass carp stocked in 2025, per the recommendation of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) grass carp stocking model and TAG.

Results of the 2025 vegetation survey indicated that 10% of the total vegetation at Lake Gaston was represented by hydrilla and it occupied an estimated 468 acres of the shoreline littoral zone. This acreage has increased from 2025, however 120 of the 468 acres identified were detected using a newly implemented survey method (kayaks) that allows surveyors to access hydrilla in shallow water environments. Therefore, this increase may be more representative of changes to survey methods than the hydrilla population. Although incomplete at the time of TAG, the survey data of the areas upstream of Easton Ferry bridge did not display any major increases in the estimated tuber bank.

### *Lyngbya Management Efforts – Overview*

Following the TAG recommendations, 477 acres of lyngbya were targeted for management utilizing algaecides in 2025. Treatment sites were distributed throughout Lake Gaston.

Results of the 2024 vegetation survey indicated that 17% of the total vegetation at Lake Gaston was represented by lyngbya and it occupied an estimated 818 acres of the shoreline littoral zone. This is the second consecutive year in which overall estimated lyngbya acreage has decreased and is currently at the lowest reported since 2019. Distribution of lyngbya has remained constant, however benthic mat densities are displaying a shift from moderate to trace levels.

## **Native Vegetation – Overview**

Mark Fowlkes with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) highlighted efforts directed at the establishment of native aquatic vegetation in 2025. Due to the success of already established exclosures (cages) and the rapid expansion of native

species, this was the second consecutive year in which efforts were focused on cage removal. Cages that were deemed successful and suitable for removal in 2025 were located in the upper Great Creek area.

## **Research Updates**

Michael Fisk with the NCWRC updated the group with the preliminary results from a project focused on potential interactions between Tidewater Muckets and lyngbya in Lake Gaston. The first objective of the project evaluated the mortality rate of mussels placed in cages within areas containing established lyngbya mats, areas that were incorporated into the lyngbya management program, or areas void of lyngbya and algicide treatments. Results indicated that higher mortality was found in sites where mussels were interacting with lyngbya and lower mortality was observed in cages located within treatment sites and areas that were void of lyngbya and algaecide treatments. The second objective focused on if Tidewater Mucket mortality increased when the mussels were located directly beneath a dense lyngbya mat formation. Results showed increased mortality of mussels directly beneath dense lyngbya mats when compared to mussels in cages void of lyngbya.

## **Requested Topics for Discussion**

Jeff Zimmer of the Stakeholders group requested the following topics for TAG discussion:

- Status of vegetated fish attractors
  - Baumann indicated that project was concluded due to the use of eel grass and concerns over increased distribution and potential hybridization.
- Plans for a UAS survey in 2026
  - Baumann indicated that there were plans to perform aerial surveys of the revegetation exclosures in 2026.
- The process of monitoring revegetation exclosures and determining if objective needs are being met.
  - Discussion over if qualitative vs. quantitative measures were more appropriate, but no consensus was found.
  - Baumann highlighted that value should also be placed on how volunteer efforts for this project increases stakeholder investment in the lake.

## Requested Topics for Discussion (con't)

- The potential need for a vegetation end state objective, including appropriate measuring metrics.
  - Much discussion was had on this topic including the possibility of incorporating data from other biological parameters, determining the areas of lake in which to evaluate, and the importance of including diversity into the metric.
    - **ACTION ITEM:** It was determined that further discussion was needed on this topic and it was recommended that a side committee be formed that focused on determining the most appropriate method to evaluate aquatic vegetation success.
- Value of incorporating data related to privately contracted treatments
  - Simpson of Dominion indicated that private treatment data would not be released by Dominion.
- The expansion of native species (eel grass, American lotus, southern naiad, etc.) and how to best address it.
  - This was discussed further under Future Research Needs.

## Future Research Needs

Baumann highlighted several potential research projects focused on native vegetation expansion, hydrilla management, and lyngbya management.

The first topic was focused on the expansion of native vegetation. Two projects discussed were:

- Identifying southern naiad growth factors.
- Evaluating mixed stands of southern naiad, hydrilla, and eel grass in terms of growth competition and appropriate management strategies.

The second and third topics were related to management efforts. Three projects discussed were:

- Determining shallow water feeding habits for grass carp.
- Continued efforts directed at the lyngbya toxin project.
- Determining the efficacy of algaecide rates utilized in the treatment program.

## 2025 TAG Recommendations Discussion

*Motion for approval: Rob Emens / Second: Dan Michaelson*

- Continue funding and support of volunteer and NCSU shoreline vegetation survey efforts.
  - Approved, no comments.
  
- Hydrilla Management: Treat a maximum of 408 acres and stock 1,341 grass carp.
  - Approved, no comments.
  
- Lyngbya Management: Treat a maximum of 500 acres and continue monitoring the efficacy of the current treatment program.
  - Approved
  - Comments:
    - Zimmer asked about the possibility of increasing total acreage to 600.
    - Richardson suggested that if an increase was approved, a study should be conducted to identify any potential accumulation of legacy copper within treatment sites hydro soils.
  
- Continue to encourage partnerships and collaborations directed at habitat enhancement at Lake Gaston.
  - Approved, no comments.
  
- Explore potential research project ideas related to: native vegetation expansion, hydrilla management, and lyngbya management.
  - Approved, no comments.