

# The Franklin News-Post

## Grass carp approved — again — to curb invasive plant in Smith Mountain Lake



JASON DUNOVANT The Roanoke Times Dec 19, 2025

Faced with the rapid return of hydrilla to Smith Mountain Lake, the Tri-County Lakes Administrative Commission decided earlier this month to once again release sterile grass carp to feed on the invasive vegetation.

The TLAC board voted unanimously to reintroduce the carp next year to combat the surging spread of hydrilla at multiple coves and docks around the lake. The commission has been inundated with more than 80 reports of hydrilla sightings this year. In some areas, the weed has taken over large sections of coves.

"I think everyone was a little surprised," said Edgar Tuck, chairman of the TLAC board, said about the rapid return of hydrilla.

Hydrilla, an invasive aquatic plant, is seen covering a section of Little Bull Run in Smith Mountain Lake earlier this year.



The Roanoke Times, File September

The weed can quickly grow into thick clumps in the water that can make navigating the area by boat difficult. Some lake residents have recently reported it has become difficult to get their boat out of their dock due to the thick patches.

It is a significant return this year for a plant that virtually disappeared from Smith Mountain Lake in 2013 when 6,000 sterile grass carp were introduced to eat the weed. Hydrilla was first discovered in the lake in 2007, and it grew into large patches in multiple areas in just a few short years.

By the end of 2013, grass carp had eliminated all signs of hydrilla. The carp also devoured nearly all other vegetation in the lake, which was a concern for local anglers who know vegetation is often a prime location to find hiding fish.

Why did hydrilla make a comeback?

Because the grass carp were sterile and unable to reproduce, they had an estimated lifespan of about a decade. It is now 12 years later and becoming evident that those grass carp stocked in 2013 are no longer able to do their job keeping hydrilla at bay.

Hydrilla is an extremely resilient weed. If any part of the plant remains, it will grow back. Any parts of the plant can also break off and travel to other areas of the lake and take root.

The plant likely hitched a ride to Smith Mountain Lake by boat that traveled from a lake with hydrilla stuck in its propeller or intake valve. That is believed to be how it has spread to lakes around the country since it first arrived in the United States in the 1950s.

TLAC has now appropriated \$20,000 for the purchase of additional sterile grass carp to curb the spread of the hydrilla. TLAC Executive Director Kristina Sage said there have been no definitive plans on when the carp will be introduced, but they expect it to be sometime in the late spring.

Hydrilla grows in thick patches underwater that can make navigating the lake by boat difficult.



The Roanoke Times, File September

"The longer we let it spread, the greater of a problem it will become," Sage said.

Timing and costs of new carp

By introducing the grass carp in the late spring, there will be a supply of hydrilla to feed on. Hydrilla is a perennial weed that dies back in the winter but regrows when the weather warms.

Hydrilla is known to be a favorite food supply for the sterile grass carp. By providing them with an ample supply, Sage said, they may be less likely to munch on some of the native vegetation which anglers like to use to catch fish.

Sage said TLAC and the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources have agreed to greatly reduce the number of grass carp since the 6,000 released in 2013 proved to be far more than what was necessary.

She said TLAC plans to release no more than 1,500 carp this time.

"We want to be really thoughtful about how we do this," Tuck said about limiting the number of grass carp this time to possibly lessen the impact on native aquatic vegetation.

Appalachian Power Co., which manages Smith Mountain and Leesville lakes formed with the creation of Smith Mountain Dam, has agreed to conduct a full lake survey next year following the release of the carp. The survey will provide information on how successful the carp have been in eating the hydrilla. Sage said more carp could be introduced if the survey shows they are needed.

"The survey will help to give us some good feedback," she said.

Sage said TLAC plans to begin looking for a company to provide the grass carp in the coming months by looking at cost estimates. The 6,000 grass carp purchased by TLAC in 2013 cost just over \$30,000.

TLAC also plans to hold a public meeting in late January or early February to discuss current plans to release the grass carp. An additional meeting will be held for anglers around the same time to discuss impacts to fishing on Smith Mountain Lake.

Sage said the meetings will be held at the TLAC office in Moneta. Dates for the meetings will be provided in the coming weeks.

Sage added that TLAC will contact anyone who reported hydrilla and weed overgrowth this year to let them know about the public meetings once the dates have been set.

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