

# The Lake Conroe Habitat Management Plan What's New In 2010



By: Mark Webb

## Exotic Vegetation is Under Control

Although the exotic plant hydrilla has been under control at Lake Conroe since the spring of 2008, the work to achieve a sustainable balance between exotic aquatic vegetation control and the native aquatic vegetation community (much needed for water quality and fish and wildlife habitat) continues. Complete aquatic vegetation surveys are conducted twice a year on Lake Conroe (late spring and early fall) by TPWD to monitor all of the aquatic vegetation. Based on these surveys the Lake Conroe Aquatic Habitat Management Plan is modified to meet the current needs. The latest survey conducted in September of 2009 indicates that we're on track with the control of exotic vegetation! The grass carp (vegetation eating fish) stocked in Lake Conroe from 2006 through 2008 continue to control hydrilla with less than 10 acres of hydrilla currently present in the reservoir. Because of the herbicide treatments conducted by the San Jacinto River Authority and their contractors, both giant salvinia (a highly invasive aquatic fern) and water hyacinth are also under control. The September survey found only 6.4 acres of giant salvinia and less than a quarter of an acre of water hyacinth!

## Native Plants Continue to Struggle

The native vegetation in Lake Conroe is slowly recovering from the collateral damage caused by the 111,000 grass carp stocked for hydrilla control. (Approximately 52,000 grass carp are still in the lake.) However, the current coverage of 254 acres is far below the healthy 1,500 acres of native plants that inhabited the reservoir four years ago. In addition, the plant community is now composed primarily of emergent species such as panicum, cattail, and water willow instead of submersed plants like coontail. Even though the shallow water emergents are extremely valuable as nursery habitat for small fish, greater diversity is still needed.

## What's Next?

**Exotic Plants** – The battle against exotic aquatic plants in Lake Conroe will probably continue as long as there is a Lake Conroe. For now, TPWD will continue surveying the vegetation twice a year and assisting SJRA with funds and support as they continue their excellent work in the treatment of giant salvinia.

**Native Plants** – Work to restore the native plant community at Lake Conroe is ongoing with thousands of native plants transferred from the Seven Coves Bass Club nursery below the Lake Conroe Dam to the reservoir in 2009 by Bass Club members and other conservation minded individuals. For 2010, The Seven Coves Bass Club plans an even more aggressive schedule of planting. Also, everyone is reminded that it is illegal to remove ANY vegetation from Lake Conroe without

a permit from TPWD and approval from SJRA. For more information on obtaining a vegetation control permit please go to the TPWD website

at [http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/water/environconcerns/nuisance\\_plants/](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/water/environconcerns/nuisance_plants/) or send us an email at [mark.webb@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:mark.webb@tpwd.state.tx.us). ♦



*Emergent plants like spikerush provide critical food and shelter for juvenile fish.*



*Flooded wooded plants like these "senna beans" provide spawning and ambush feeding structure for largemouth bass and sunfish. This type of structure is especially important until deeper water native vegetation recovers.*

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