

# Updates on the Cogongrass Front

The Georgia Department of Agriculture issued a statewide ban on the sale of cogongrass, a non-native and aggressively invasive species of grass. Cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*) is already listed as a noxious weed by the United States Department of Agriculture and is therefore illegal to transport across state lines. The new action makes the growing, cultivation or sale of the plant a violation within the state of Georgia.

Cultivars are sold under the names Japanese blood grass and “Red Baron” grass. There is a reddish tint to the leaves which accounts for the name and sole ornamental quality. Cultivars such as “Red Baron” are thought to be sterile (producing no viable seed), but long-term behavior of the plant is unknown. Cultivars of the grass have demonstrated aggressive spreading by roots. They will also sometimes revert to green.

“Think of kudzu as a grass,” said Commissioner of Agriculture Tommy Irvin. “Georgia garden centers and nurseries are stocked with plenty of other ornamental grasses or other plants that will substitute for these grasses. Everyone agrees this is a wise precautionary measure.”

This ban is part of an ongoing effort among the nursery industry, USDA Forest Service, University of Georgia Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health, Georgia Department of Agriculture and the Georgia Forestry Commission to prevent further introductions of cogongrass into the environment. The Georgia Department of Agriculture has 24 inspectors that will enforce the ban and help educate nurseries and garden centers about this new regulation.

**GEORGIA** — On May 8, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed by more than 20 cooperators/shareholders creating a statewide Georgia Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) focused on cogongrass. A ceremony was hosted by the Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center in Baker County, Georgia. The MOU establishes a mutually agreeable framework for cooperatively addressing the short and long term negative

effects of cogongrass within the State of Georgia. All parties to the MOU agree that it is to their mutual interest and benefit to work cooperatively in education, detection, inventorying, monitoring, controlling, and preventing the spread of cogongrass. For more information, see [www.cogongrass.org](http://www.cogongrass.org).

**NORTH CAROLINA** — The North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) Plant Industry Division is implementing a policy change that will prohibit the propagation, nursery cultivation, sale and distribution of cogongrass, (*Imperata cylindrica*), along with all cultivars including “Red Baron” or Japanese blood grass. This action is intended to prevent further introduction and secondary spread of cogongrass into and within North Carolina. Additionally, this policy change is needed to ensure North Carolina’s regulatory actions are in harmony with those of surrounding states. Cogongrass has been detected and is a major concern in the states of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida and South Carolina. It was recently detected and confirmed in Tennessee. State and federal agencies have been working together for four years to detect all known cogongrass infestations and to eradicate them.

Effective immediately, the NCDA&CS, Plant Industry Division will deny permits for the interstate movement of Cogongrass, including cultivars referred to as “Red Baron” or Japanese blood grass, and will enforce regulatory restrictions on all nursery propagation, nursery cultivation and sale/distribution of cogongrass, including cultivars, after October 31, 2008. Existing inventories of cogongrass must be sold or removed from nurseries or nursery dealers by October 31, 2008.

For more information, contact your local NCDA&CS Plant Pest Specialist or Rick Iverson, Weed Specialist, NCDA&CS at 1-800-206-9333, 919-733-6932, or [Rick.Iverson@ncmail.net](mailto:Rick.Iverson@ncmail.net).

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Compiled by Carey Minter and Dave Moorhead, Ph.D., Center for Invasive Species & Ecosystem Health, 229-386-3298, [moorhead@uga.edu](mailto:moorhead@uga.edu)

## Multistate Cogongrass Project Supported by USDA – Forest Service

State and Private Forestry, USDA Forest Service, has initiated a Competitive Resource Allocation program designed to focus an increasing percentage of S&PF funding on issues and landscapes of national importance. The southern states selected a proposal focused on cogongrass and sponsored by Georgia, Florida, South Carolina and Alabama.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND BENEFITS:** This project will include three phases over a three-year period targeted to the needs of each partner state within the larger regional goal of reducing the further spread of cogongrass in the Southeast, and preventing further invasion of Georgia and South Carolina.

Emphasis areas will include: **detection and mapping, direct control** (on-the-ground treatment) of priority infestations, and **education/outreach**. There are many partners from state, federal and private organizations working on this effort. The project will receive \$1,100,000 in federal funds over three years, to be matched by the receiving states with an additional \$1,100,000 in non-federal funds, resulting in \$2,200,000 dedicated to the cogongrass issue.

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John W. Taylor, Jr. Integrated Pest Management Specialist, Forest Health Protection, State and Private Forestry, Southern Region, USDA Forest Service, [jwtaylor@fs.fed.us](mailto:jwtaylor@fs.fed.us)