Cogongrass is a world-class weed that is invading Alabama and other Southern States. The outcome of cogongrass occupation on other continents has been devastating and this same trend is underway in Alabama. It can eventually cover most uncultivated lands in much of Alabama and the Southeast. It will not magically disappear someday. Concerted programs are required to combat it.

- Cogongrass stops productive use in forest lands, pastures, pecan and other orchards, and impacts container crops and right-of-way management.
- Cogongrass is highly flammable and presents high risks to rural homeowners and firefighters.
- Wildlife habitat is destroyed and hunting privileges denied.
- Recreational value is none and the natural beauty that is Alabama will be defaced.
- Eradication costs vary but exceed $150 per acre and can range much higher.

Cogongrass first entered the US accidentally near Grand Bay in 1911. Several more intentional introductions were made for forage trials in adjoining states. Between 1952 and 1974, cogongrass invaded 850 acres per year in Mobile County to occupy 10,000 acres by 1974. Now cogongrass infests an estimated 1.25 million acres in Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida (Wilson Faircloth 2004), and occupies lands in Louisiana, Georgia, South Carolina, and Texas.

Counties with cogongrass infestations (Wilson Faircloth 2004)

The Costs of Cogongrass

It is estimated that cogongrass occupies at least 200,000 acres in Alabama, with an average estimated cost of eradication over a multi-year period of $300 per acre. Thus, the current eradication costs will be at least $60 million. The yearly loss of productivity in forests is estimated at $50 per infested acre. Because it can be assumed that 75% of the infested lands are forest lands, the annual loss is $7.5 million. Loses in pasturage and hay production are not included but could significantly increase this amount. The ecological costs are:

- Forest lands are changed into savanna forests as has occurred in other infested countries.
- Threatened and endangered species, habitat, and forest types are severely compromised.
- Whitetail deer, turkey, dove, squirrel, quail, and rabbit habitat will be destroyed and hunting lease options eliminated.
- Catastrophic wildfire will be more prevalent across the landscape.
- Clean air and clean water will be impacted by increased wildfire.
Cogongrass spreads along our highways

Cogongrass Spread
occurs above and below
ground. Long distant
spread is by wind-blown
seed that are produced in
the 1000’s by each plant in
early spring. These
seeds also can be moved
in contaminated straw, pine
straw, and can hitchhike on
boots and equipment.
Spread from existing plants
occurs by branching
underground stems that
grow out about 1-2 yards
and sprout to form new
plants. Movement of soil
contaminated with roots
during highway shoulder
and embankment con-
struction and maintenance
is recognized as a route of
spread. In other states, an
ornamental red-leaved
variety is still sold and
contributes to spread. We
must stop the spread.

Locations of cogongrass infestations along major
highway right-of-ways in 2002 (W. Faircloth)

Combating Cogongrass

- Form an Alabama Cogongrass Task Force to obtain grants and National and State support.
- Organize a coordinated and cooperative effort within the State and with adjoining state
task forces and alliances.
- Obtain increased funds for incentive payments to private landowners for treatment.
- Support programs aimed at eradicating cogongrass on public lands and nature
preserves.
- Support research aimed at developing effective eradication and rehabilitation procedures
for all land and use types.
- Educate the citizens of Alabama to the dire threat that cogongrass represents to current
land uses and to our future.

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Information from Ph.D. Dissertation by Dr. Wilson Faircloth 2004 “Management Tactics for Cogongrass
on Alabama Rights-of-way and Forests.” Research under the direction of Dr. Mike Patterson, AU, and
sponsored by a grant from the Alabama Department of Transportation.

For more information visit Website on Cogongrass developed by Drs. Patterson and Faircloth
http://www.ag.auburn.edu/agronomy//cogongrass/