

# SE-EPPC Annual Symposium Grows into a Conference

by James (Jim) H. Miller, Program Chair, SE-EPPC Conference, Alabama Invasive Plant Council Board Member

“**Grow in Power**” should be our EPPC watch words these days, if we want to get ahead of massive exotic pest plant invasions. Thus, the 7th Annual SE-EPPC Symposium grew to a “Conference,” complete with 140 participants, powerful presentations, concurrent sessions and two SE-EPPC strategic planning sessions (see this issue). The Conference—“*Invasive Plants - Arming to Defend and Win*”—convened May 3 and 5 on the outskirts of Birmingham, Alabama. It was a beautiful location on a bluff over the Cahaba River, with just-right meeting rooms and great lunches under warm skies by the pool. Attendees learned much, formed new networks, and had a good time as well—in our tradition of excellent annual symposia. The entire proceedings, with abstracts and PowerPoint presentations, are available at [www.se-eppc.org](http://www.se-eppc.org)—check it out in all the details—and limited hardcopies (valiantly produced by Michele Whatley and the Forest Service team at Auburn) are available from [jmiller01@fs.fed.us](mailto:jmiller01@fs.fed.us)

The Alabama Invasive Plant Council (ALIPC) hosted the conference, ALIPC President Keith Tassin chaired the local arrangements, and I had the “pleasure” of being technical chair. It was a profitable event due to good attendance and the gallant efforts of Curtis Hansen (ALIPC Treasurer), Michelle Isenberg (sponsorships and vendors), Nancy Loewenstein (silent auction and T-shirts), Erwin Chambliss (computers and Power Points), and the tireless enactment team: ALIPC newly-elected President, Ben Moore; Vice-President, Howard Peavey; and “founding father of ALIPC,” David Teem. There were many other ALIPC members that contributed to the effort, to say the least.

The Alabama Commissioner of Natural Resources, M. Barnett Lawley, followed the welcome by SE-EPPC President Brian Bowen with a presentation on “Alabama the Beautiful and Our Invasive Predicament.” Commissioner Lawley has met with the ALIPC Executive Board on two prior occasions to discuss our state’s exotic pest plant problem and he had the opportunity to learn more from our expert plenary speakers. I gave the opening presentation on “Organizing to Succeed against Invasive Plants and Strategies to Take Control and Restore.” An insightful tutorial was provided on political activism for 501(c)3s (not-for-profit organizations) by veteran staffer and lobbyist James Cummins, Wildlife of Mississippi. He told us to gain a champion, develop a message, refine the message, and never quit pushing the message with letters, votes and money.

Vic Rudis, USDA Forest Service Survey Unit, displayed the latest unsettling data on the status of regional invasions of for-

est lands. Half of all forest acres have at least one invasive plant present. Ted Center, USDA ARS, provided an update on released and potential biological control agents in the region, with special focus on aquatic plants. Ted told me in discussion that he thought agents for Chinese privet and Japanese honeysuckle should be possible, given the funds (everyone get their hands out).

Dave Moorhead, University of Georgia, presented the latest on the arsenal of herbicides and application technology to treat alien plants. He provided valuable insights into how we can gain extensions of existing herbicide labels for those effective against specific invaders. For mechanical control options, Bob Rummer, USDA Forest Service Operations Research, displayed the latest technology and explained the capabilities. He also showed the latest in precision herbicide application equipment with GPS tracking and logging. GPS and GIS technology was more fully explored by the last plenary speaker for the day, Dale Loberger, ESRI Inc. He convinced most of us that we need recurring short courses to stay abreast of these powerful technologies.

## Focused concurrent sessions were convened on:

- **Developing Lists and Species Strategies** –  
Chaired by Randy Westbrook, USGS National Invasive Plant Coordinator, with special presentation by Al Tasker, USDA APHIS National Invasive Species Coordinator.
- **Ecology, Genetics, and Impacts of Invasive Plants** –  
Chaired by Charles Bryson, USDA ARS Scientist
- **Invasive Plant Survey and Monitoring** –  
Chaired by Jack Ranney, University of Tennessee
- **Control, Containment, and Eradication Research** –  
Chaired by Dave Moorhead, UGA
- **Organizing Regionally, Sub-regionally, and Locally** –  
Chaired by John Byrd, Mississippi State University
- **Control and Restoration Projects Underway** –  
Chaired by John Taylor, USDA Forest Service.

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Further discussions included possible funding mechanisms for the executive director position and reinstating the SE-EPPC newsletter. A consensus of those attending thought the newsletter was important enough for state chapters to financially support the cost of printing and mailing, as done in the past.

Some final discussion addressed the SE-EPPC webpage and some of the improvements that were expected. An idea to develop an invasive exotic plant distribution map for the Southeast was discussed. Networking opportunities were explored to determine other groups who shared the same interest (e.g., Southern Appalachian Information Node) and who had available technology to partner with us on this task. These talks will continue.

Our strategic planning process created a list of goals and action items, but much of this is presently impeded by our lack of a director. Someone working on these items full-time will definitely make much of this possible. We will continue to keep our planning open to SE-EPPC members and welcome your participation.

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These sessions contained 24 presentations from an array of graduate students, scientists, and professional experts. In addition, there were six informative poster presentations displayed during the conference.

Two excellent "closing presentations" kept everyone's interest until the end. Chuck Barger, representing the UGA Bugwood Team, gave numerous insights into the powers of websites and images for invasive knowledge networks. David Borland, Alabama TNC, inspired us with the philosophical underpinning for rescuing and restoring our natural heritage. Later in the evening a gourmet banquet and dancing ensued in the SE-EPPC "Conference" tradition.

The field tours on May 5 were perhaps the highlight of the gathering. In Birmingham, Consultant Mark Thomas, Forestry/Wildlife Integrations, showed how one expert, energetic man armed with the right technology can rescue and restore a highly infested park single-handed. Following this, Marty Schulman, Ruffner Mountain Preserve, shared how to effectively involve volunteers in combating invasives in a preserve. In Huntsville, Andy Prewett, The Land Trust of Huntsville and North Alabama, and Amy Werkheiser, OMI, Inc., also shared how to involve volunteers and community groups in fighting invasive bush honeysuckles and winning.

It could not have been a better "Conference" and we look forward to next year in North Carolina.



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