

# Invasive Species Plant Lists: A Step Toward Consistency Among SE-EPPC Chapters

By Brian Arnold and Nancy Loewenstein

The creation and maintenance of an “Invasive Plant List,” a list of non-native plants that are invasive or likely to become invasive within a given geographic area, is arguably the most critical function of an Exotic or Invasive Plant Council. In addition to identifying invasive plants, these non-regulatory plant lists often provide additional information such as distribution, type of habitat at risk, economic impacts, and other information that can be used by natural resource professionals and land managers.

As important as plant lists are, their creation and maintenance can be onerous. There are often differing opinions regarding list structure and the myriad of criterion that must be considered. These differences of opinion and the lack of a model plant list have resulted in varying list structures among the SE-EPPC chapters, with each one requiring an expense of time and energy to interpret and comprehend. In addition, the validity and defensibility of lists that have disparate criteria for evaluating plants may be questioned. The lack of a comprehensive structure also gives the appearance of a lack of cohesiveness within the SE-EPPC.

A consistent listing structure among EPPCs and IPCs would facilitate the use of plant lists across multiple regions. It would also suggest a broader acceptance of criteria and methods used and, in so doing, aid in the validity and defensibility of individual lists. Furthermore, establishing a broadly accepted and consistent format should facilitate the creation of new lists where needed.

With this in mind, the SE-EPPC applied for and was awarded a \$7,000 grant in 2011 from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Southern Region. A significant portion of the grant was applied toward comparing the methodologies used to create invasive plant lists by SE-EPPC chapters. It was hoped that a byproduct of the grant project would be increased communication and sharing of ideas among chapters regarding plant listing and other aspects of invasive plant management.

Two successive Invasive Species Specialists were hired by SE-EPPC to complete the work specified within the grant. Side-by-side comparisons of chapter plant lists were made, numerous phone interviews with EPPC and IPC list committee members were conducted, and a number of natural resource professionals were interviewed. In addition, an online survey regarding plant list data, as well as the Early Detection and Distribution Mapping System (EDDMapS) and Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMAs)/ Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMAs), was sent to EPPC and IPC list-servs to gather information from a broader base of the invasive plant community.

## First steps may be easy

Though there are differences in chapter plant lists that might require spirited debate to overcome, there are some factors for which a consistent format could likely be achieved with minimal conflict. For instance, there is no consistency in the titles used for the plant lists on the respective chapter websites and the titles of the actual documents (Table 1). However, agreement on standard titles may be something that chapters could easily achieve.

There is also variation in what types of information are included on state chapter plant lists (Table 2). Examples include whether or not to include data such as “growth form” or “current use.” Although consideration of the “ecological impact” of invasive plants may be debatable, a decision on whether or not to include such data could perhaps be agreed upon at the regional level.

The SE-EPPC Invasive Species Grant Report identified key elements that all lists should contain. These include: 1) stated purpose for list, 2) clearly defined structure, 3) transparency, 4) ability to access key data online, and 5) updates every 2-4 years.

Complete information regarding plant listing and other aspects of the grant, such as EDDMapS use and CISMAs in

**Table 1.** Titles for Plant List website links and documents among SE-EPPC Chapters from the *SE-EPPC Invasive Species Grant Report*.

| State Chapter  | Name for link / Name on document  |
|----------------|---|
| Alabama        | 2012 Updated Plant List Of Invasive Plants  |
| Florida        | FL-EPPC List of Invasive Plant Species / FL EPPC’s 2011 Invasive Plant Species List |
| Georgia        | Plant List / List of Non-native Invasive Plants in Georgia                          |
| Kentucky       | Exotic Plants List / ----   |
| Mississippi    | DRAFT Plant List / DRAFT: Noteworthy Exotic Plant Species for Mississippi           |
| North Carolina | North Carolina Invasives / ----   |
| South Carolina | Invasive Plant List / SC-EPPC Terrestrial Exotic Invasive Species List 2011         |
| Tennessee      | Invasive Plants / TN-EPPC Invasive Exotic Pest Plants in Tennessee                  |

**Table 2.** Information included on SE-EPPC State Chapter Plant Lists. Data from the *SE-EPPC Invasive Species Grant Report*.

| Information on List                     | AL | FL | GA | KY | MS | NC | SC | TN | TOTAL |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-------|
| Category rank                           | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  |    | ✓  | ✓  | 7     |
| Scientific name                         | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | 8     |
| Common name                             | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | 8     |
| Growth form                             | ✓  |    |    |    | ✓  |    | ✓  | ✓  | 4     |
| Physiographic regions                   |    | ✓  |    |    | ✓  |    | ✓  |    | 3     |
| Habitats/land uses                      | ✓  |    |    |    | ✓  |    |    |    | 2     |
| Current uses                            | ✓  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 1     |
| Federal/state noxious weed list(s)      |    | ✓  |    |    | ✓  |    | ✓  |    | 3     |
| Other states in which species is listed |    |    |    |    | ✓  |    | ✓  |    | 2     |
| EDRR (Early Detection/Rapid Response)   |    |    |    |    |    |    | ✓  |    | 1     |
| Link to additional info or maps         |    | ✓  | ✓  |    |    |    | ✓  |    | 3     |
| Management difficulty                   |    |    |    |    | ✓  |    | ✓  |    | 2     |
| Ecological impact                       |    |    |    |    | ✓  |    |    |    | 1     |
| Economic impact                         |    |    |    |    | ✓  |    |    |    | 1     |

the southeast, can be found in the *SE-EPPC Invasive Species Grant Report* on the SE-EPPC website. The report was authored by Kathryn Wilson, one of the Invasive Species Specialists hired by SE-EPPC. An article summarizing the report can be found on page 6 and the full report may be found on the SE-EPPC website ([www.se-eppc.org](http://www.se-eppc.org)).

### Where do we go from here?

Over the last year, the effort to address consistency in plant list content and structure has also gained momentum at the national level (see article, page 10). A recognized need for standardized invasive plant lists that would be acceptable for use with green building codes led the National Association of Exotic Pest Plant Councils (NAEPPC) to initiate collaboration with the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) to develop an official standard. The proposed standard will “describe the criteria and procedures to develop an invasive plant list for a specific geographic region and will serve as a foundation for creating such lists to support building codes and related applications.” Having an ASTM standard should provide validity to all invasive plant lists that meet the standard criteria.

The SE-EPPC Board of Directors, realizing the logic in considering the national ASTM process and wishing to support it via involvement of SE-EPPC board members, decided to await the outcome of this national effort prior to charting a separate course unique to the southeast.

Though complete consistency between chapter plant lists may require years to

achieve, we can take significant steps by addressing some of the “soft items” discussed here by increasing dialogue, and through participation in the ASTM effort. Though there will no doubt be some argument involved, we will ultimately strengthen our plant lists and our efforts to manage and control invasive plants.

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