

Resolution of the Southern Association of State Departments of Agriculture (SASDA) Expressing Cooperative Support for a Regional Approach toward the Research, Control and Eradication of Cogongrass, a Noxious Weed Common in the Southeastern Region of the United States

Whereas, Cogongrass is an established noxious weed in many counties of the southeastern states. Cogongrass was accidentally introduced into Mobile, Alabama in 1912 as packing material. It was intentionally used as a potential forage crop in several southern states during the 1920's and later used in soil reclamation projects. Even today, cultivars of this plant are being sold by nurseries and distributed throughout the region.

This plant has been very successful due to its wide range of habitats (poor sands to rich sandy loams, full sun to deep shade, and extreme drought to water logged soils). It is extremely fire tolerant and may reproduce both sexually and asexually.

Cogongrass is a threat to native plant communities where it competes intensely for available light, water, and nutrients, thus displacing indigenous species. It is also allelopathic and creates such a physical barrier that it is difficult for seedling establishment of native plants, including pine trees. Forage value is negligible because of high silica content. The young shoots are sharply pointed, and they may damage the mouths of grazing livestock.

Cogongrass negatively impacts numerous wildlife species including the threatened Gopher tortoise, wild turkey, Bobwhite quail, songbirds, white-tailed deer, and even waterfowl that depend on shallow water areas.

Its distribution has spread rapidly in the past few years and is now known to be present in seven southeastern states. Locally, this weed may reproduce and advance at a rate of 43 square feet per eleven weeks of conducive environmental conditions. Therefore, this pest will, in turn, out-compete many native and indigenous species. There are many vectors for the spread of Cogongrass including the unintentional movement by highway maintenance crews, fire equipment, and wind dispersal of seeds, and a host of less obvious means. The sale of Cogongrass cultivars which are being sold under the trade names of "Japanese Bloodgrass," "Rubra," and "Red Baron" is also another means of spread.

Be it resolved, only with a collective and coordinated effort among the States in the affected region, and in additional coordination with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), can we maximize our efforts and resources, to include a control/eradication program in place to combat this pest.

Be it further resolved, due to the rapid rate of spread for this noxious weed, it is very important to act immediately in order to minimize the threat and maximize our resources.

Be it further resolved that the SASDA meeting in Lexington, Kentucky, October 5, 2002, hereby expresses its strong support for a cooperative effort among the southern states affected, toward the research, control and eradication of Cogongrass.

Be it also resolved that the SASDA call upon Congress and the USDA to support these efforts to control and eradicate Cogongrass, with their policies and all other available resources, including funds for a control/eradication program.

Signed by SASDA member state representatives in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.

FLEPPC applauds the Cogongrass Resolution adopted by the Southern Association of State Departments of Agriculture (SASDA) since it will heighten awareness and focus further attention upon this severely invasive plant in our continent. Cogongrass adversely impacts diverse plant communities and many animals in Florida and other southeastern states by severely altering fire ecology, community diversity and wildlife forage quality. Its invasiveness stems from its capabilities to tolerate and flourish under wide ranges of conditions, rapidly reproduce by sexual and asexual means, and be spread by numerous pathways.

Hopefully, outreach like the SASDA resolution will lead to effective local and regional management of cogongrass. It already is listed amongst this country's Federal Noxious Weeds, so interstate commerce in the species is illegal. However, it reportedly is still available for sale in North America. Florida is the apparent sole state, to date, to declare it a State-prohibited plant. All affected states, governmental entities and land managers need to recognize the adverse impacts of cogongrass everywhere it occurs in North America and support its management by every means possible.

— Mike Bodle, FLEPPC Chair