

“Meeting the Challenges of Invasive Non-native Plants” at the GA-EPPC 2009 Annual Meeting

by Brian Arnold

The Georgia Exotic Pest Plant Council (GA-EPPC) held its 2009 Annual Meeting at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia in Athens on November 5th. A diversity of professionals from four southeastern states attended “Meeting the Challenges of Invasive Non-native Plants.” Cynthia Taylor, Natural Resource Manager for Elachee Nature Science Center, and newly-elected GA-EPPC president, welcomed attendees and introduced speakers.

Dr. James H. Miller, Research Ecologist with the U.S. Forest Service, Southern Research Station, and Affiliate Professor of Forestry with Auburn University’s School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, was the keynote speaker. In his presentation, “Heroic Group and Individual Efforts are Finally Making a Difference,” Dr. Miller recognized the many efforts of GA-EPPC members and their volunteer teams who have conducted projects aimed at controlling non-native invasive species. He praised the collective efforts of GA-EPPC in formulating one of the most complete invasive plant lists in the region, and the many invaluable websites from the University of Georgia’s Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health. He commended the formation of the four state cogongrass and invasive species task forces, and announced the newly posted regional maps and spreadsheets showing occupation of 33 high threat invasive taxa at www.invasive.org/fiamaps/. He stressed EPPC’s role in informing “those in power” of the bio-security threat posed by invasive species. In comments that led to lively discussion, Dr. Miller challenged attendees to consider the emerging understanding regarding the liabilities of prescribed burning in opening forest stands to invasions by invasive species. He stressed that good judgment must be used with prescribed burning, weighing the positive benefits with these liabilities when invasives occur nearby. Dr. Miller also mentioned the pending revision of his popular “Nonnative Invasive Plants of Southern Forests.” An expanded two-volume set should be available for distribution by early summer.

James Johnson, Forest Health Coordinator for the Georgia Forestry Commission, discussed federal stimulus funding of invasive species control efforts. Mr. Johnson’s presentation, “Georgia’s Invasive Species Incentive Program – Economic Stimulus Funding,” outlined the process



of awarding \$1,795,000 in stimulus funds. Mr. Johnson explained that although the funds are designated for invasive species control, the primary purpose is job creation. Although Georgia State Park and Historic Sites and the Warnell School lands managed by the University of Georgia have funds earmarked for invasive species surveying, control and marketing of a consistent invasive species message, the majority of the funds will go to private land owners, with “limited resource” landowners receiving priority. Although the application period has expired, more details about the program are available at www.gatrees.org.

Newt Hardie, leader of the Kudzu Coalition, presented “Using Farm Equipment to Kill Kudzu.” The Kudzu Coalition, a Spartanburg, SC non-profit organization, has gained much recognition for its innovation in controlling kudzu and other invasive species. The Coalition consists of a volunteer work force that operates without grants of any kind. The Coalition uses no herbicides but does work together with owners using chemical treatments – usually by removing any surviving kudzu plants. Mr. Hardie provided an entertaining presentation in which he demonstrated how his organization uses modified farm equipment and skid steer (Bobcat) tractors to battle kudzu. Several of the innovations were engineered by Coalition volunteers. Participants were treated to images of “Kudzilla,” a skid steer tractor growing in fame and being used in various applications. In order to learn more about the Coalition’s work, visit www.kokudzu.com and check out Kudzu Kollege. In a second presentation entitled “Engaging Volunteers in the Fight Against Invasives,” Mr. Hardie described experiences and lessons learned in finding, recruiting, and retaining volunteers.

Steve Sanchez, Landscape Architect with Hughes, Good, O’Leary and Ryan, addressed attendees in a presentation entitled “Non-native Invasive Species and the Challenge of Landscape Design.” Mr. Sanchez is recognized for his use of native plant material and his concern for invasive plant issues. He shared the challenge of creating a functional and aesthetic landscape without the use of invasive exotic plants. Mr. Sanchez explained the

difficulty in finding native plants that satisfy the needs of landscape clientele, which leads to the use of exotic species. The role of the Green Industry and the lack of knowledge by many landscape architects regarding native and/or invasive plant material were discussed.

Chuck Bargeron, Information Technology Director with the University of Georgia Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health, presented “Georgia Invasives – Implementing Volunteer Mapping Using EDDMapS.” EDDMapS, the Early Detection & Distribution Mapping System, is used to record and map the locations of invasive species. It cooperates with and aggregates data from other invasive species mapping projects, and provides an important tool for management. For example, it is used in Early Detection & Rapid Response (EDRR) ef-

forts to prevent establishment of invasive plants into new areas, and to justify the need for management and resources. Mr. Bargeron explained the simple process by which an individual can register as a user and in so doing, take advantage of benefits such as receiving an email alert in the event that a given invasive is reported within a designated territory. Users can assist the system by reporting an invasive found in an area where it has not yet been recorded. Attendees were informed of enhancements that are planned for EDDMapS, including online training courses that will qualify for Continuing Education Credits. EDDMapS can be found on the UGA Center’s website at www.invasive.org.

Danielle Greene, GA-EPPC board member and Curator of Horticulture and Environmental Initiatives at Zoo Atlanta, led

a panel discussion addressing the topic of working with volunteers. Panelists, including Ms. Taylor and Mr. Hardie, as well as Ayanna Williams of Park Pride, Blake Watkins of Trees Atlanta, and Dave Butler of Dekalb County Parks Department, offered attendees their advice by sharing stories of successes as well as failures.

The GA-EPPC business meeting included the election of officers:

President:

Cynthia Taylor, Natural Resource Manager, Elachee Nature Science Center

President Elect:

Mincy Moffett, Georgia DNR Nongame Conservation Section

Secretary:

Brian Arnold, Natures Landscape Services, Inc.

Treasurer:

Elaine Nash, Georgia Native Plant Society

Presentations from the annual meeting can be viewed at: <http://www.gaepcc.org/2009presentations.cfm>

Other GA-EPPC activities can be found at www.gaepcc.org.

Brian Arnold, Natures Landscape Services, Inc., brian@natureslandscapeservices.com

Visit these award-winning examples of volunteers in action against invasive plant species:

Beachvitex.org is home to the Beach Vitex Task Force that is committed to controlling the spread of the invasive plant, *Vitex rotundifolia* in North and South Carolina. This site provides facts about beach vitex and serves as an information clearinghouse.

www.kokudzu.com is home to the Kudzu Coalition and serves a diverse group of volunteers exploring new ways to control kudzu in South Carolina. Sign up for Kudzu Kollege!

