

Cogongrass: An Increasing Threat to South Georgia

by Christopher Evans, University of Georgia and Georgia EPPC

Cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*) is a serious invader of open lands and forests throughout much of the southeastern United States. Mississippi, Florida, and Alabama have extensive infestations that harm both the ecology and economics of natural resource management. Native to Southeast Asia, cogongrass was introduced in the early 1900s for erosion control and as a forage crop. It quickly escaped initial plantings and began spreading throughout the southeast.

Once established, cogongrass quickly dominates the understory plant environment where it displaces native vegetation, restricts tree seedling establishment, and increases fire risks. These potential hazards and the aggressive nature of cogongrass led to it being listed as a Federal Noxious Weed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS).

Until recently, only small isolated occurrences of cogongrass had been found in the state of Georgia. In the fall of 2004, several acres of dense cogongrass were found in Mitchell County, Georgia in a 10 year-old planted loblolly pine stand. The center of the infestation occurs in the middle of the pine stand and only a small portion has spread onto a road right-of-way. The cogongrass is aggressively displacing all other understory plants and in most of the infested area it is the only plant species in the understory. The origin of the cogongrass introduction has not been determined but it may have come in on equipment used in planting the pine trees.

Surveys were conducted in the woodlands, disturbed areas, and field edges that occur close to the infestation in an attempt to determine if cogongrass had spread or if any additional infestations had occurred. Several small satellite populations were found in the immediate area. Control of the infestation is being conducted and a combined effort from the Georgia Department of Agriculture, USDA-APHIS, the University of Georgia, the Georgia EPPC, and the Georgia Forestry Commission has been initiated to increase both surveying efforts and educational outreach programs. Previously, only limited surveys were conducted because it was thought that cogongrass was not a major problem in Georgia. New surveys will assess how large of a problem it has become. Educational outreach efforts are currently targeting foresters, wildlife biologists, landowners, and others who are likely to come across cogongrass while working. The programs focus on identification of cogongrass and stress the importance of reporting infestations.

For more information, contact Christopher Evans at the Coastal Plain Experimental Station, P.O. Box 748, Tifton, GA 31793; 229-386-3298; cevans@uga.edu



Closeup of cogongrass leaves, showing characteristic off-center whitish midvein.



◀ Thick infestation of cogongrass within a planted pine stand.
▼ Cogongrass forms a dense mat.

