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Contact: Bill Baisden (334) 240-9367

AFC Announces Key Strategies to Fight Cogongrass Using Federal Stimulus Grant

As announced earlier in the spring, the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) was awarded a \$6.3 million grant to embark on a cogongrass control program in Alabama. Although this funding provided through a 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Grant will enable the AFC and its partners to initiate a proactive, coordinated campaign to combat cogongrass, it will not begin to cover the expected costs to eradicate the noxious weed from Alabama. Considering the extensive number of acres already infested, it is estimated that costs would exceed \$50,000,000 to minimize the threat of cogongrass throughout the state.

In regard to the grant, State Forester Linda Casey said, "Ultimately, we wish to completely eradicate this nuisance, as well as all other non-native invasive species. However, with the welcomed but limited funding provided, it will be impossible to make a significant impact for all landowners where cogongrass is widespread and in the counties where this invasive plant has been allowed to grow virtually unchecked since 1912. All interested citizens need to be aware of this reality. We believe it is possible to convince our state and federal elected officials, as well as the US Forest Service, that given the appropriate funding, we *can* win the war against cogongrass. This current funding does indeed provide a start, but that is it all it can be."

The following broad strategies have been outlined by the Commission for the campaign against cogongrass:

- (1) Define a geographic region of the state where cogongrass can and will be eradicated once it has been detected and precisely mapped;
- (2) Allocate resources such that strategic buffer zones can be established to keep the weed from moving back into areas that are free of cogongrass;

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- (3) Begin a statistically valid detection and mapping program in the most heavily infested areas, so that informed decisions can be made as to how to eradicate the plant across the state;
- (4) Finally, do everything possible to secure additional funding during this three-year program, such that a full-scale detection and eradication program can be initiated.

To begin the first proactive large-scale control of cogongrass in Alabama, Casey announced that the AFC has contracted with the forest management firm of Larson & McGowin, Inc. to provide the critical role of Project Coordinator. Said Casey, "Larson & McGowin's reputation as a leader in forest management and consulting throughout the South, as well as the fact that the company is Alabama-based, made it a solid choice."

Larson & McGowin, Inc. is a full-service forest management and consulting firm headquartered in Mobile. The company was founded in 1957 and has branch offices in Greenville and Birmingham, Alabama, as well as Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas. The firm has decades of experience providing property management services to small and large ownerships. Consulting and large scale project management experience includes forest inventory, appraisal, technical mapping, and analysis. Though focused on the southern United States, the firm has experience in other regions including U.S. Northeast, Pacific Northwest, Canada, Central America, and South America. Its subsidiary, Silvics Solutions, offers natural resource focused software and information technology services.

Barrett McCall, RF/ACF and President of Larson & McGowin: "Alabama is a world leader in forest management as a result of decades of cooperative efforts between landowners, the Alabama Forestry Commission, and forestry professionals across the state. Tackling the complex management problems posed by invasive species such as cogongrass is important for us to continue this history of excellence. This grant gives us a much needed boost in these troubled economic times to get started. I am confident our forestry community is up to the challenge and our team at Larson & McGowin very much appreciates the opportunity to be of service in the war on cogongrass."

A website (www.alabamacogongrass.com) has been established to facilitate communication with Larson & McGowin. The website will be updated regularly as the program develops. For further information, contact Ernest Lovett, Project Coordinator, at (334) 240-9348 (elovett@alabamacogongrass.com) or Stephen Pecot, Communications Director, at specot@alabamacogongrass.com. Vendors and applicators should submit their contact information to info@alabamacogongrass.com or fax to (334) 240-9388, Attn: Cogongrass Program.

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