

Introduction

This Regional Cogongrass Conference was organized because of the deep concerns expressed by many over the unrelenting invasion of this bold, unwanted, and hard-to-control grass, this cogongrass. Even though many seem acquiescent to the spread of kudzu, privets, or honeysuckle, the takeover by cogongrass drives well deserved fears and dire predictions by land users, owners, and conservationists alike. Its occupation is so tight and complete that it excludes even other invasive plants, and certainly most wildlife, insects, and micro-fauna and flora. It does not just alter the web-of-life, it replaces it with a lime-green biological desert. It completes its domination by burning so intense that it consumes any and everything to below 10 feet high, whether native shrubs or human structures, to threaten the lives of firefighters. Throughout the World, on every continent except Antarctica, its notoriety as the “Worst Invasive Plant of Non-crop Lands” is well-earned since it exacts huge tributes and enacts lasting changes on cultures that live close to the land, and our southern culture actually lives close to the land but few remember this. We live from the land still in both sustenance and spirit, since we have been blessed to inhabit one of the richest land-plant-soil systems remaining on the planet. Few other countries can even remember such a time in their recent history, their time is long past, but we live in such a time now. How long will this last?

Only recently have we learned that major civilizations throughout history have “perished” when they neglected or overused their productive land base, or when climate change had it in for them (see Jarred Diamond’s *Collapse*). From the current vantage point it might appear that both of these factors are at work now--unrelenting occupation by cogongrass and other invasives that stop productivity and the warming and drying of our region. Both factors challenge our resolution and creativity to JUST recognize the problems in enough time, confront the problems, organize and arm ourselves, and enact well-devised solutions, or at least attempt solutions. There is one other common trait that “perished” civilizations shared that now harkens to us; their leaders failed to understand the real land-soil-plant crises, pointed to other less severe problems as the culprit, and did not lead needed proactive programs and life-style modifications. Most of these past demises were thought to be insurmountable changes underway caused by demon spirits. We are hopefully not that ignorant now, and know better. AMERICANS know we CAN do the improbable and have done it before given that we are organized, trained, and empowered to apply or collective and individual initiatives. We can stop cogongrass, if we so desire, there is no doubt. Notwithstanding that facing a common foe for the common good is not in vogue, since self interests appear to rule the day.

This Conference hopefully will play a pivotal role in changing our predicament by detailing the problem due to cogongrass, the circumstances that hinder right action, and the direction we should collectively take armed with the knowledge that we have gained. Many of the experts on cogongrass from impacted states in our region willingly gathered to share their knowledge at this Conference and provided carefully written instructions that form this first edition “The Cogongrass Management Guide”, which now you have in your hands. We are exceedingly grateful to them for their dedication of time and energy. These experts are both knowledgeable and form the frontlines for combating cogongrass in their states and do it on a regular and persistent schedule. It is not easy to confront this invasion at this time in our history. Dr. Ray Dickens, Auburn University, was first to stand up in the 1970’s and boldly state that we must stop cogongrass now or we will regret otherwise. He was right, but unfortunately ignored. Others have followed him and done their best to combat cogongrass, like Art Miller, APHIS, in Georgia during the 1990’s. Now we must say it louder, together, and to our citizens and leaders, “We must stop this invasion of cogongrass.” We must stop it even though it is like fighting a huge, spotting wildfire, and like slowing a runaway locomotive heading straight towards us and gaining speed. We cannot stop saying “Stop this Invasion” and killing cogongrass where we find it, because if we do not stop it in the South, it will consume much of lands and spread throughout the Eastern and northwestern U.S. We are on the frontlines. It is our responsibility, not others. There is no other time, but now, and no place to hide from the future blame of yet unseen generations saying “we wasted our precious lands and land resources by relenting to this tyrant grass.... that now we have to live with and make a living from and raise our children in a degraded landscape”, much like the rest of the world does today. JHM