



Georgia's Cogongrass Efforts: How one state organized to be effective in combating cogongrass

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Cogongrass in Georgia

There were fewer than 10 known cogongrass infested sites in Georgia in 2004 and USDA APHIS (Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service - Plant Protection and Quarantine) were treating the sites. The low number was due to the efforts of APHIS under the leadership of Art Miller who had led an active cogongrass eradication program in the 1990's. The Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) received an invasive species grant in 2004 from the USDA Forest Service (USFS), Forest Health Protection/State and Private Forestry Branch and began examining the problems of invasive plants throughout the state. Cogongrass was quickly recognized as the most serious threat despite the low numbers of sites and acres reported. As information on this species was circulated within the GFC, The University of Georgia (UGA) County Extension Agents and other partners during the year, **many additional spots were located, primarily in the southwestern portion of the state, confirming our suspicions that there were numerous unreported infestations of cogongrass.**

Partnerships are required

Our veteran district forester in southwest Georgia, Greg Findley in Camilla, immediately recognized the threat it posed to this region with the vast agriculture, forests, and quail plantations. A task force was organized to formally address the issue and some of our key partnerships with other groups and agencies began at that time:

- University of Georgia – Bugwood Network,
- USDA APHIS, USFS,
- Georgia Department of Natural Resources and
- The Jones Ecological Center
- Mark Atwater – Weed Control Unlimited, Inc.

This initial meeting occurred in spring 2005 and the group decided upon several courses of action and these included: education of any groups or organizations who could help us with our detection efforts, determine if remote sensing to detect cogongrass is possible (and affordable) via either satellite imagery or aircraft, and plan a legislative tour for spring 2006.

Education is the Key

The educational efforts began in 2005 and the GFC, and the University of Georgia Bugwood Network were the primary movers involved. As more groups and individuals were reached, the number of infested sites continued to rise that year and there were indications that APHIS had reached the maximum number they could effectively treat (along with the other ongoing invasive work). With supplemental funding from the USFS, the Georgia Forestry Commission's Director, Ken Stewart, decided that cogongrass was a high priority and we should take over the role of treating new sites if necessary and use our personnel towards the cogongrass effort. We developed a contract between the private landowners and our agency and through numerous discussions with the State Attorney General's staff, a

final document was eventually crafted (attached at the end):

<http://www.gatrees.org/ForestManagement/Cogongrass.cfm>

A State MOU for Cogongrass

A memorandum of understanding to establish a cogongrass weed management area for the state of Georgia has been drafted and circulated (and approved) by the many partnering groups and agencies (see below). A formal signing and press event will occur in late winter 2008. We feel that we have one opportunity to get the most media attention from this event and we want it to coincide with the spring seeding characteristic that is the most recognizable taxonomic characteristic for the public.

Key partnerships (and roles) for the leadership within Georgia's Cogongrass Program:

1. GFC – education, detection and field visits when reported, eradication treatments
2. UGA – education, detection, web support, printed materials and publications
3. USDA APHIS (PPQ) – detection and eradication treatments
4. USDA USFS – funding, education
5. Jones Ecological Center – education and outreach
6. Georgia Department of Agriculture – detection and plant industry regulation enforcement
7. Mark Atwater – Weed Control Unlimited, Inc.

Surveying for Infestations

The education and outreach component has been critical to finding infested sites as well as minimizing spread and future introductions. Over 200 presentations have been made since 2000 that included information on cogongrass (12,000+ attendees). Some of the target groups included: GFC foresters and fire fighting personnel, UGA County Extension Agents, Georgia Department of Natural Resources personnel (conservation rangers, foresters, park rangers, wildlife biologists), professional foresters, numerous logger sessions, Department of Transportation right-of-way personnel, Georgia Public Works Association (and targeting County Public Works Department), Georgia Vegetation Management Association, Georgia Power (right of way and land management foresters and contractors), Timber Companies (Plum Creek, Rayonier, and MeadWestvaco), Congressional and State Legislators (tour at Tall Timbers Research Station, hunters, outdoor enthusiasts, forest landowner groups, and presentations at numerous landowner field days. There are still many educational opportunities to pursue in the future.

Political support is Critical

A legislative tour was held at the Tall Timbers Research Station on August 17, 2006 and numerous local political leaders, state legislators, and congressional aides attended along with herbicide company representatives, University faculty (from UGA and MS State), State and private foresters and other resource professionals. Classroom presentations as well as a guided field trip allowed for a full day of information exchange.

Stopping vectors of Spread

Several infestations were likely initiated by out of state hunters who brought in improperly sanitized equipment to establish and maintain food plots. Targeting this group has been more ambiguous but articles have been published by several groups with widespread magazine distribution to: National Wild Turkey Federation, Georgia Outdoor News and the Georgia Wildlife Federation. Also, an ad

was formulated and published in the Georgia Hunting Rules and Regulations Book (this is a free publication that lists all game season, limits, etc.) that is available at all places where hunting licenses are sold with a printing volume of 550,000 annually.

The **Georgia Department of Transportation** (Right of Way Division) have received numerous training sessions, and not only have workers looking for cogongrass, but have implemented a sanitation requirement for out of state mowing crews who maintain our Interstates throughout the state. Numerous talks have been given to **Georgia Loggers** regarding the likelihood cogongrass could be transported on improperly sanitized equipment. Several infestations likely originated in this manner.

Working with Neighboring States

Currently, the GFC is partnering with the SC Forestry Commission and the Florida Division of Forestry, seeking a regional grant to continue our efforts. We plan to execute a Memorandum of Understanding to establish the entire state of Georgia as a Cooperative Weed Management Area for Cogongrass in the late winter/early spring period of 2008, and will attempt to maximize media coverage of this event to get the public looking for cogongrass when the seed heads are present. Our outreach work that has gained momentum will continue into the future to gain additional partners in the detection effort.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN

MEMBERS OF THE COOPERATIVE WEED MANAGEMENT AREA

This MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING is hereby made and entered into by and between: Georgia Forestry Commission, USDA APHIS Plant Protection and Quarantine, USDA Forest Service, University of Georgia, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Georgia Department of Agriculture, Georgia Department of Transportation, Georgia Exotic Plant Pest Council, Georgia Forestry Association, Tall Timbers Research Station, Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center, Georgia Power Corporation, and The Nature Conservancy. Each group listed will be referred to as a COOPERATOR elsewhere in this document, and this list isn't all-inclusive and can change at any time as new partners are added.

A. PURPOSE:

The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is to establish a mutually agreeable framework for cooperatively addressing the short and long term negative effects of Cogongrass within the State of Georgia. Furthermore, it is agreed that our educational activities where possible and practical should encourage the public to report suspect cogongrass finds, and the site will be verified and appropriate control measures taken. The boundaries of this cooperative weed management area shall be the entire state of Georgia.

B. STATEMENT OF MUTUAL BENEFIT AND INTERESTS:

All parties to the MOU agree that it is to their mutual interest and benefit to work cooperatively in education, detection, inventorying, monitoring, controlling, and preventing the spread of cogongrass within the State of Georgia. All parties also agree it is to their mutual benefit and the natural environments of the State to work cooperatively to educate, train, and share technology between partners and the general public about cogongrass and serious impacts this plant could have on our natural environments if left to spread unchecked. Furthermore, we agree to work cooperatively to seek funding to detect and eliminate this plant from Georgia.

C. ALL PARTIES SHALL:

1. Work to detect all known infestations and define the boundaries of these for the purpose of eradication and future monitoring and retreatments as needed. The area boundaries will be defined on a map and will be made part of the Cogongrass Strategic Plan.
2. Work to establish an Integrated Cogongrass Strategic Plan which will describe the goals and objectives for the area and will be the guiding document for the cooperative management of Cogongrass eradication within the state of Georgia.
3. Coordinate cogongrass activities based on the framework items mentioned above (i.e. items 1& 2). Agreed upon activities will be identified as potential projects each year in an Annual

Operating Plan, and these management activities will be implemented through the Cogongrass Strategic Plan.

THE GEORGIA COGONGRASS TASK FORCE SHALL:

1. Utilize their organization to represent private landowners and other organizations in cogongrass management activities anywhere within the State of Georgia.
2. Utilize their organization to facilitate the sharing of resources from State, Federal, and private sectors to implement cogongrass detection, education, eradication and related activities. This agreement does not imply the transfer of any funds.
3. Support the Cogongrass Task Force, as well as other concerned citizens and organizations, to coordinate cogongrass management activities within Georgia.
4. Conduct business as authorized by appropriate law and authorities.

D. IT IS MUTUALLY UNDERSTOOD AND AGREED BY AND BETWEEN THE PARTIES THAT:

1. PARTICIPATION IN SIMILAR ACTIVITIES. This instrument in no way restricts the COOPERATORS from participating in similar activities with other public or private agencies, organizations, and individuals.
2. COMMENCEMENT/EXPIRATION/TERMINATION. This MOU takes effect upon the signature of the COOPERATORS and shall remain in effect through January 1, 2012 at which time it will expire unless extended. This MOU may be extended or amended upon written request of either the Georgia Forestry Commission or COOPERATORS; either the Georgia Forestry Commission or COOPERATORS may terminate this MOU with a 30-day written notice to the other(s). In addition, any COOPERATOR may elect to withdraw from this MOU at any time by providing notice to the other COOPERATORS.
3. RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTIES. The COOPERATORS and their respective agencies and office will handle their own activities and utilize their own resources, including the expenditure of their own funds, in pursuing these objectives. Each party will carry out its separate activities in a coordinated and mutually beneficial manner.
4. NON-FUND OBLIGATING DOCUMENT. Nothing in this MOU shall obligate any task force member to obligate or transfer any funds. Specific work projects or activities that involve the transfer of funds, services, or property among the various agencies will require execution of separate agreements and be contingent upon the availability of appropriated funds. Such activities must be independently authorized by appropriate statutory authority (or corporate, as applicable). This MOU does not provide such authority. Negotiation, execution, and administration of each such agreement must comply with all applicable statutes and regulations.
5. ESTABLISHMENT OF RESPONSIBILITY. This MOU is not intended to, and does not create, any right, benefit, or trust responsibility, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or equity, by a party against the United States, its agencies, its officers, person, or COOPERATOR.

