

Invasive weed is everywhere

Taking hold

Cogongrass poses threat

By Mark Rogers
Managing Editor

It looks ornamental, but it is an aggressive invader and it is taking over land all around South Mississippi.

Cogongrass is becoming a real threat in Marion County according to Randy Browning who is with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Wildlife Mississippi.

Browning spoke to a large crowd of people representing state agencies, county supervisors, people in the forestry industry and private industry. The group then traveled to a location off

See 'Grass' Page 3



Randy Browning shows local, state and federal representatives what the root system of Cogongrass looks like. The group traveled to a site east of Columbia to see samples of the invasive weed. At right, Browning handed out flags to mark patches of the weed.

photos by Mark Rogers





Cogongrass is seen in a field off U.S. 98 near Columbia.

photo by Mark Rogers

Grass

continued from Page 1

U.S. 98 East of Columbia with Baxter Rowley of the Mississippi Forestry Commission.

"I hope you'll take this seriously," Browning told the group. "Cogongrass is considered the seventh worst weed in the world. It is a very invasive plant ... not only here, but all over the world."

The plant initially arrived in the U.S. at Mobile Bay in 1911 or 1912 and was used as a packing material. Then was grown to stabilize soil. It creates its own chemical to prevent other plants from growing near it and is the earliest blooming grass in the South.

Cogongrass seed can blow up to 15 miles in the wind and carried by birds or other animals. Many cases of it spreading can be attributed to man, as equipment from road mowers to four-wheelers can carry the seeds.

"The cleanup after Katrina helped spread Cogongrass," Browning said. "It is hard to kill and the roots are tenacious." For Marion County, Cogongrass could have very serious effects on the forestry industry. "It will grow through the roots and compete with other species."

It also adds to the fire hazard on properties. Cogongrass burns at temperatures approaching 840 degrees and can cause high flames, which could damage a pine forest. It also poses a threat to wildlife including the Gopher Tortoise.

"It's in all the counties in Mississippi," Browning said.

"We've got to step up and do something about this." It spreads quickly, and in about 11 weeks can extend over 40 square feet."

"In Marion County we start seeing it bloom in March," Browning said. "We're behind the 8-ball, there's no doubt." There are several control strategies, which include mowing or burning it in late winter or early spring. Also, applications of herbicides also help.

"The only way you're going to get rid of Cogongrass is to get mad at it," Browning said. "From a Marion County standpoint, we need to look at Cogongrass as garbage."

The Marion County Forestry Association and several other local, state and federal groups are planning to hold an informational meeting about the threat soon according to Russ Ford. "It's a growing problem," Ford said.

The species is an aggressive invader of natural and disturbed areas throughout the Southeast. It disrupts ecosystem functions, reduces wildlife habitat, decreases tree seedling growth and alters fire regimes and intensity. Cogongrass is a Federal Noxious Weed, and the appropriate state or federal authority must identify any infestation.

Browning said that if you think you have Cogongrass you should contact the state department of agriculture of local USDA office. More information is available at www.cogongrass.org. ■