

Cogongrass – The Perfect Weed

Submitted by Randy Browning, private lands biologist, Mississippi Field Office

Now considered “the seventh worst weed in the world,” cogongrass was accidentally introduced into Alabama in 1912 as a packing material for fruit. Ever since, this species has aggressively spread across the South.

Cogongrass, *Imperata cylindrica*, has numerous traits that contribute to its extremely aggressive nature. This grass blooms early in the spring and each plant can produce up to 3,000 seeds. Cogongrass has an extremely thick root system and also reproduces asexually via rhizomes. And, its relatively high rate of natural propagation is accelerated by mechanical spread.

Infestations from this alien plant have serious implications for resource management. Dense stands of cogongrass can cause significant stress on forested lands by competing for available moisture and nutrients and by literally growing through tree roots. Jam-packed stands of this aggressive weed create physical barriers that keep native plant seeds from ever reaching mineral soil. Unchecked, cogongrass will not only displace native vegetation that wildlife depends upon, but will also create stands so hard to penetrate that many ground dwelling animals find it difficult, if not impossible, to travel through.

Because of the tenacity of this species and the need for public outreach, the Lamar County Conservation District filmed a 10-minute video on cogongrass identification and control and posted it on YouTube. For the full story on cogongrass, control click on this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e2bz1UnEtC4>

Participants in the video include: Lamar County Conservation District Manager, John T. Monroe Jr.; University of Southern Mississippi’s Associate Professor in Biological Sciences, Dr. Michael Davis; and Randy Browning and Russ Walsh, both U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists.



Patch of cogongrass in full bloom. *Photo credit: Randy Browning, FWS*