



News Release

For more information, contact:

James Johnson

706.542.9608

jjohnson@gfc.state.ga.us

GaTrees.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE...MARCH 23, 2009

PUBLIC'S HELP NEEDED TO LOCATE HARMFUL WEED

The Georgia Forestry Commission is asking for the public's help to stop a harmful weed from spreading statewide. Cogongrass is a non-native weed that has taken over millions of acres in the southeast. It flourishes in numerous soil types and chokes out natural vegetation, which significantly reduces tree and plant regeneration, wildlife habitat, forage and ecological diversity. Cogongrass is extremely flammable and difficult to eradicate, due to its dense root system.

Within Georgia, there are 23 state, federal and private groups that have formally partnered to locate and destroy infected sites and educate landowners about the threat. The Georgia Forestry Commission offers free eradication treatments to landowners who have Cogongrass. The GFC also partners with other member states of the Southern Group of State Foresters (Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, North and South Carolina) to combat the invasive weed regionally.

Cogongrass was first introduced into the United States near Grand Bay, Alabama in 1911 via seed in grass packing materials used in shipping containers from Southeast Asia. It has spread throughout Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida and has now been found in 28 Georgia counties.

The grass is most easily recognized in the spring flowering and seeding period (March through May in Georgia) when the white fluffy seeds are produced and dispersed. Cogongrass has sharp pointed, scaly rhizomes with a very dense root system, and grows in a circular-shaped pattern. It also has an off-centered midrib on leaf blades that measure between one and five feet.

"Our purpose as a group is to address the short and long term negative effects of Cogongrass in Georgia," said Robert Farris, Director of the Georgia Forestry Commission. "We want the public to report sightings of this dangerous weed so that our teams of Professionals can take the necessary measures to bring this threat under control."

The Cogongrass threat is considerable because of the weed's aggressive and destructive nature. A single plant can produce up to 3,000 seeds, which spread easily in the wind. Individual, underground rhizomes or pieces of rhizomes can sprout new plants as well. Rhizome pieces are easily transported to new areas in contaminated soil, hay, sod, or on equipment, launching still more infestations. The roots and rhizomes of Cogongrass are fire-tolerant, but leaves and flowers of the plant are extremely flammable, creating a fire hazard for firefighters and citizens living in rural areas.

Residents who suspect they have found Cogongrass should contact their local GFC office and avoid mowing or disking through or near the area to avoid further spread. Photographs and more information about Cogongrass can be found on the GFC website at GaTrees.org.

#