Cogongrass - *Imperata cylindrica*

**Identification**

Cogongrass is a perennial colony-forming grass up to six feet tall. The clumps of grass arise from the ground, with no apparent stem. The leaf sheaths overlap near the base. The leaves have an off-center midrib that is whitish in color, but this is a variable trait (Figure 1). Leaf margins are finely serrated giving it a sharp texture. Ligules are fringed membranes. The sharp, branched, white rhizomes are concentrated in a dense layer in the top six inches of soil (Figure 2). Cogongrass blooms from late March to mid June (flower timing depends somewhat on local climate). Flowers and seeds are in a large fuzzy panicle, giving the flowering plant a cottony or silky look. Cogongrass rarely is found as a single plant but quickly forms patches or infestations, often circular in outline (Figure 3).

**Habitat and Distribution**

Cogongrass is native to Southeast Asia and was first introduced into the southeast United States in the early 1900s. Initially cogongrass was planted for forage and erosion control; however it is unpalatable for livestock and not well suited for erosion control due to its aggressive behavior. Cogongrass can invade a wide variety of sites including road sides and rights-of-way, forests, pine plantations, ditches, pastures, field edges, orchards, levees, sand dunes, and waste areas (Figure 4). Cogongrass will not grow in saturated soils, but tolerates periodic flooding reasonably well. It can also tolerate saline environments and drought. It can grow in both deep shade and full sunlight. It cannot successfully invade areas that are annually cultivated. Fire stimulates growth and flower production. Cogongrass can grow in moderately cold weather, being found as far north as the Tennessee border inland and to Connecticut along the coast. Cogongrass is widespread and extremely problematic in Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. It is currently sparsely located in Louisiana, Georgia, and South Carolina. Cogongrass’ introduced range in the United States is expected to continue to expand.

**Impact**

Cogongrass can form dense mats that exclude all other understory vegetation (Figure 5). Cogongrass has little or no value for wildlife either as food or habitat. Desirable species are displaced and new species are prevented from establishing. Dense infestations restrict tree and shrub establishment. Cogongrass is very flammable and creates fire hazards especially in winter. The thick thatch layer dries quickly and burns very hot. Prescribed and wild fires in infested areas are more intense than in native vegetation (Figure 6), and trees can be damaged or even killed during these fires. Wildlife, including gopher tortoises and indigo snakes, and game species such as bobwhite quail and wild turkey, are negatively impacted by cogongrass and habitats may be completely lost due to heavy infestations.

**Control Recommendations**

In pine stands thoroughly wet all leaves with a tank mix of 1-2% Arsenal AC® plus 2% glyphosate plus 1% Dyne-a-pak® surfactant; or 2% Chopper® plus 2% glyphosate plus 1% Dyne-a-pak®. Use 15-25+ gallons of water per acre. When desirable hardwood trees are present apply 2% glyphosate plus 1% Dyne-a-pak® in 15-25+ gallons of water per acre. Both applications can be made anytime the cogongrass is actively growing. Mowing or careful prescribed burning of the thatch in late winter can aid herbicide treatments.

*Nontarget plants may be killed or injured by root uptake.

Prepared by Karan Rawlins and David Moorhead, the Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health, The University of Georgia, Tifton - September 2009. BWS5

The preparation of this fact sheet was financed in part through a grant from U.S. Forest Service in partnership with the Georgia Forestry Commission as part of the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act.