
Handout 1: Threat or not a threat?

Does anyone know when (if) an exotic plant species will become an invasive exotic?

Cogon grass (*Imperata cylindrica*)

Cogon grass is a perennial grass that grows about two to four feet high. The leaves are about an inch wide, end in a sharp point, and have finely toothed edges that hold silica crystals. Cogon grass forms a dense mat of thatch and leaves, which makes it very difficult for other plants to sprout and grow. This mat also provides fuel for intense and frequent fires. These fires are hard on native species. A single plant of Cogon grass can produce several thousand very small seeds that may be carried great distances by the wind.



Cogon grass grows throughout the southeastern United States in many types of ecosystems. Cogon grass is hardy and tolerant of shade and drought. Cogon grass can be found growing in many places, like on sand dunes, along roadsides, forests, open fields, and up to the edge of standing water. Cogon grass moves quickly into newly disturbed areas such as ploughed or burned fields.

Cogon grass came to the United States from East and Southeast Asia by accident as a packing material for shipping crates. It arrived in the port of Mobile, Alabama. Nurseries also sold Cogon grass for its attractive foliage and hardiness. The U.S. Department of Agriculture promoted it as forage and erosion control.

Sources:

<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/imcy1.htm>

<http://samab.org/Focus/Invasive/warning.html>