



COGONGRASS IN ALABAMA

The Takeover of Our Lands and What It Means

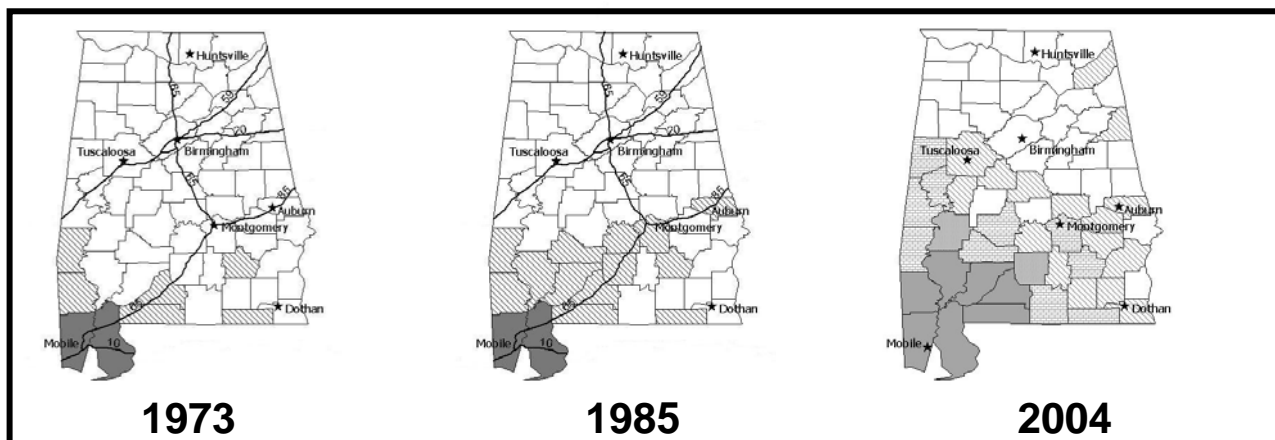
Alabama Invasive Plant Council

Cogongrass is a world-class weed that is invading Alabama and other Southern States. The outcome of cogongrass occupation on other continents has been devastating and this same trend is underway in Alabama. It can eventually cover most uncultivated lands in much of Alabama and the Southeast. It will not magically disappear someday. Concerted programs are required to combat it.

- Cogongrass stops productive use in forest lands, pastures, pecan and other orchards, and impacts container crops and right-of-way management.
- Cogongrass is highly flammable and presents high risks to rural homeowners and firefighters.
- Wildlife habitat is destroyed and hunting privileges denied.
- Recreational value is none and the natural beauty that is Alabama will be defaced.
- Eradication costs vary but exceed \$150 per acre and can range much higher.

Cogongrass first entered the US accidentally near Grand Bay in 1911. Several more intentional introductions were made for forage trials in adjoining states. Between 1952 and 1974, cogongrass invaded 850 acres per year in Mobile County to occupy 10,000 acres by 1974. Now cogongrass infests an estimated 1.25 million acres in Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida (Wilson Faircloth 2004), and occupies lands in Louisiana, Georgia, South Carolina, and Texas.

Counties with cogongrass infestations (Wilson Faircloth 2004)



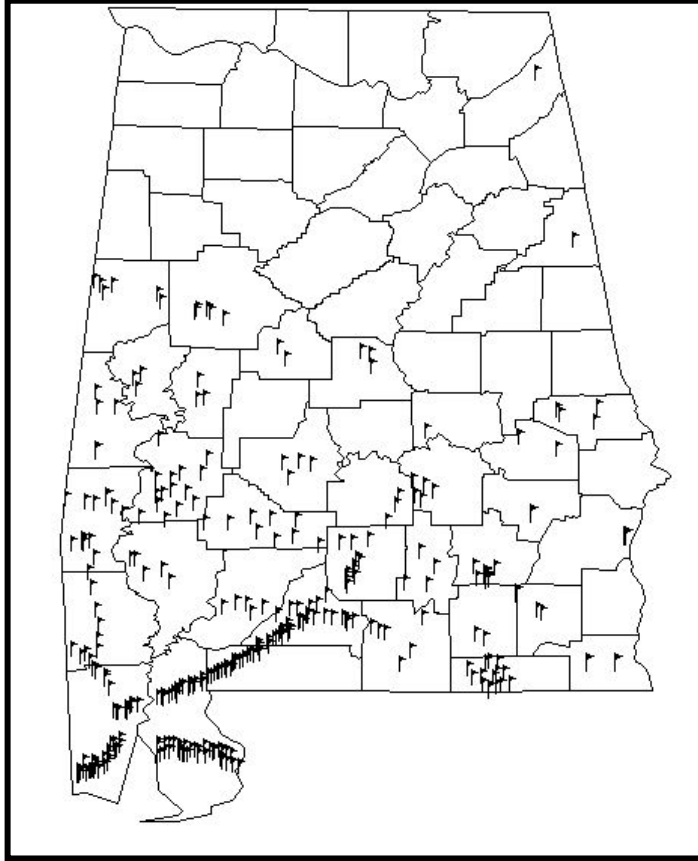
The Costs of Cogongrass

It is estimated that cogongrass occupies at least 200,000 acres in Alabama, with an average estimated cost of eradication over a multi-year period of \$300 per acre. Thus, the current eradication costs will be at least \$60 million. The yearly loss of productivity in forests is estimated at \$50 per infested acre. Because it can be assumed that 75% of the infested lands are forest lands, the annual loss is \$7.5 million. Losses in pasturage and hay production are not included but could significantly increase this amount.

The ecological costs are:

- Forest lands are changed into savanna forests as has occurred in other infested countries.
- Threatened and endangered species, habitat, and forest types are severely compromised.
- Whitetail deer, turkey, dove, squirrel, quail, and rabbit habitat will be destroyed and hunting lease options eliminated.
- Catastrophic wildfire will be more prevalent across the landscape.
- Clean air and clean water will be impacted by increased wildfire.

Cogongrass spreads along our highways



Locations of cogongrass infestations along major highway right-of-ways in 2002 (W. Faircloth)

Cogongrass Spread occurs above and below ground. Long distant spread is by wind-blown seed that are produced in the 1000's by each plant in early spring. These seeds also can be moved in contaminated straw, pine straw, and can hitchhike on boots and equipment. Spread from existing plants occurs by branching underground stems that grow out about 1-2 yards and sprout to form new plants. Movement of soil contaminated with roots during highway shoulder and embankment construction and maintenance is recognized as a route of spread. In other states, an ornamental red-leaved variety is still sold and contributes to spread. We must stop the spread.

Combating Cogongrass

- Form an Alabama Cogongrass Task Force to obtain grants and National and State support.
- Organize a coordinated and cooperative effort within the State and with adjoining state task forces and alliances.
- Obtain increased funds for incentive payments to private landowners for treatment.
- Support programs aimed at eradicating cogongrass on public lands and nature preserves.
- Support research aimed at developing effective eradication and rehabilitation procedures for all land and use types.
- Educate the citizens of Alabama to the dire threat that cogongrass represents to current land uses and to our future.

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Information from Ph.D. Dissertation by Dr. Wilson Faircloth 2004 "Management Tactics for Cogongrass on Alabama Rights-of-way and Forests." Research under the direction of Dr. Mike Patterson, AU, and sponsored by a grant from the Alabama Department of Transportation.

For more information visit Website on Cogongrass developed by Drs. Patterson and Faircloth
<http://www.ag.auburn.edu/agronomy//cogongrass/>