



Alabama Invasive Plant Council

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Giant Reed Fact Sheet and Position Statement *The Risks Associated with Alabama Growing an Invasive Plant as a Crop*

Background

Plans and procedures are underway to grow 30,000 acres of giant reed (*Arundo donax*) to be converted into high quality pulp by Global Cellulose Systems, a British company. The plantings will be in Marengo County, with a \$530 million production facility proposed to be located in Linden's industrial park with potential employment for about 500 people.

Giant reed is one of the largest and fastest growing grasses in the world. It is a recognized invasive plant and is listed as **one of the top 100 invasive species on earth** by the Global Invasive Species Program. After introduction into California as early as the 1700's, and after use as a stream-side stabilizer in the 1950's, it has become one of the most damaging invasive plants in southern California. It is also listed as a noxious weed in Texas and by four southern state exotic pest plant councils.

Giant reed flowers but does not readily produce viable seeds. It spreads by growth from stem and rhizome fragments that are carried by water along streams and rivers, or by machinery and mowing equipment. Infestations expand by rhizome growth of a few feet per year. In California and Texas, giant reed disrupts natural stream functions and flow patterns, destroys fish and wildlife habitat, and displaces native riparian vegetation. High water usage by giant reed can decrease stream flow and the shallow roots can break off from stream banks to create erosion. Clumps of giant reed float downstream and clog culverts and channels to cause local flooding. Giant reed is also highly flammable, thereby increasing the danger from wildfires, which could be catastrophic with large plantings. The pollen of giant reed is moderately allergenic and contact allergic reactions have been reported for sensitive individuals who handle the cane. Once established, giant reed is very difficult to eradicate.

Alabama Invasive Plant Council's Position

The large planting of invasive giant reed presents an incalculable risk to the people and ecosystems of Alabama. The potential for irreparable damage to the state's natural ecosystems, which provide vital ecological services to the present and future citizens of Alabama, is great.

Giant reed should not be planted near stream channels where it could readily escape to waterways.

This scale of planting has not been tested anywhere in the world. It is inadvisable to plant 30,000 acres of *Arundo donax* without 100% assurance that escape to natural ecosystems will be prevented, or if escape occurs from these plantings that detection and control will be immediate. Safeguards during growth and transportation of these plants are required, and a bond assurance should be established to guarantee compliance and to provide for potential remediation.

When and if giant reed production for Global Cellulose Systems (or another entity) is halted, a bond assurance must be required to ensure that all planted acreage and "escaped" plants will be completely eradicated. To ensure complete eradication, provisions for a minimum of two years of monitoring post-eradication should be included in the bond assurance.