

# Inaugural Conference of the National Association of Exotic Pest Plant Councils and the 35th Annual Natural Areas Conference

by Lisa Smith and Brian Bowen, Natural Areas Conference Program Chairs, Natural Areas Association Board Members

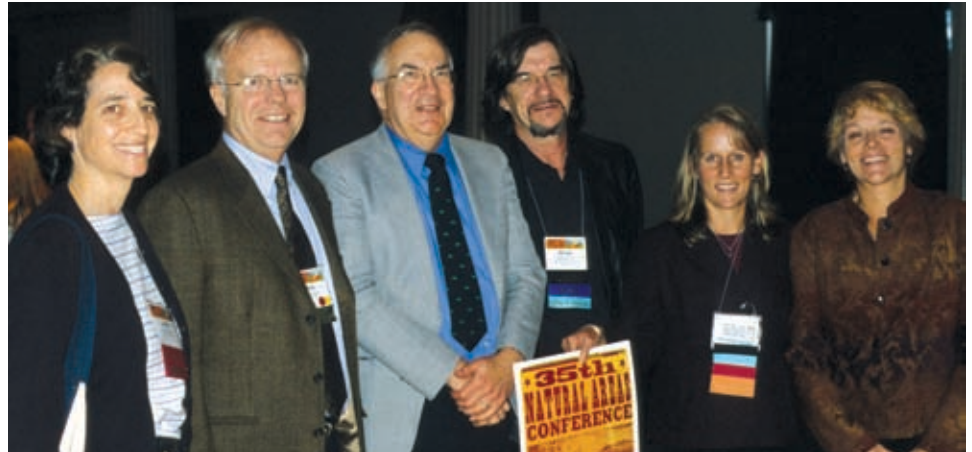
The National Association of Exotic Pest Plant Councils (NAEPPC) held its first national conference as part of the 35th Annual Natural Areas Conference on October 14-17th, 2008 in Nashville, Tennessee. The Natural Areas Association (NAA) is a long-time partner of NAEPPC.

The conference attracted 450 participants from fifty states and six countries and was hosted by the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC). The conference theme was “*Natural Areas Revival in Music City; Tuning In To A Changing Climate and Biological Invasion.*”

Pre-conference activities included two multi-day field trips at special natural areas. The most popular trip was to Savage Gulf State Natural Area on the Cumberland Plateau, where old-growth, mixed mesophytic forests once described by Lucy Braun are still found. The second field trip was to Mammoth Cave where participants explored one of the world’s most important cave ecosystems.

Pre-conference workshops and roundtables began Tuesday morning with Land Management for Land Trusts, NatureServe’s Weed Risk Assessment, NatureServe’s LandScope America, and State and Federal Natural Areas Roundtables. Workshops and training opportunities continued each day throughout the conference, led by many partner organizations, agencies, and experts including the Exotic Pest Plant Councils (EPPC), Land Trust Alliance (LTA), NatureServe, and Invasive Plant Control, Inc. One session of note was an NAEPPC Forum held on Friday afternoon where participants explored programmatic directions that the organization should take.

The conference opened with the plenary session held at one of Nashville’s historic landmarks, the War Memorial Auditorium. It began with a *cappella* revival music by the McCrary Sisters. Nashville Mayor Karl Dean welcomed everyone and spoke briefly about his administration’s “green initiative,”



(left to right) Doria Gordon (Program Committee), Richard Mack (plenary speaker), Dan Simberloff (plenary speaker), Brian Bowen (Conference Chair), Lisa Smith (Program Chair), Kim Herman (NAA President)

which complemented the efforts by conference organizers to keep the event carbon neutral and to recycle and minimize waste. Carbon credits were purchased from the Conservation Fund, which will have trees planted on NAA’s behalf in the Louisiana Red River National Wildlife Refuge.

Following the Mayor’s presentation, TDEC’s Commissioner Jim Fyke spoke on some of the state’s efforts to conserve Tennessee’s natural heritage. Ed Clebsch, a retired botanist from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville (UTK), presented a lively overview of the natural history of Tennessee. He was followed by two leaders in the field of invasive species biology, Dick Mack of Washington State University and Dan Simberloff of the University of Tennessee. Dick Mack talked about the complexity of effects that global climate change has, and will have, on biological invasions, while Dan Simberloff explored the controversial issue of using introduced biofuels to replace our dwindling petroleum supplies. The final plenary speaker was Larry Schweiger, President and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation, who shared more recent evidence of the negative impacts of global climate change on ecosystem function. He encouraged the conservation community to play an active role in supporting

pending climate change legislation.

The plenary session set the tone for the quality of presentations on Wednesday and Friday. Each day, seven concurrent sessions offered approximately 160 presentations, of which 110 were invited speakers.

In addition to the concurrent sessions that were held on Wednesday and Friday, the conference also provided opportunities for formal and informal meetings of various groups. The National Park Service Exotic Plant Management Teams, Tennessee Land Trusts Network, Tennessee Forestry Commission, NAEPPC, and the NAA Board of Directors met in conjunction with the conference. NAEPPC hosted a membership luncheon where participating EPPC’s and Invasive Plant Councils gave updates on their organization’s activities. The PowerPoint™ presentations can be viewed at <http://www.naeppc.org/presentations/>. NAA hosted a “World Cafe” luncheon for its membership to identify ways in which the organization can more effectively meet members’ needs.

On Thursday, conference participants had opportunities for more “on-the-ground” learning experiences through participation in one of twenty-four field trips to Middle Tennessee natural areas extending to the Cumberland Plateau and into Kentucky.



Ruarq Cleary (Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission) slays a Paulownia sucker under the watchful eyes of a park ranger on the Stone Door trail.

Field trips included visits to caves, waterfalls, cedar glades, barrens, old growth forests, urban natural areas, and canoe floats. In addition, there was a tour of an area land trust holding, a birding trip in Nashville,

a native nursery tour, a native grass and an invasive plant identification workshop, a GPS workshop, and an invasive pest plant site management planning workshop.

Following the field trips on Thursday, participants headed to the historic Ryman Auditorium, “the mother church of country music” and “the official birthplace of bluegrass,” for a natural areas “revival” and a celebration and recognition of individuals who have tirelessly dedicated their lives to the conservation of important places. Elsie Quarterman, retired botanist from Vanderbilt University, and Hal DeSelm, retired botanist from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, were recognized by the Natural Areas Association and presented the George B. Fell Lifetime Achievement Award on the Ryman stage. Gary Milano received the Carl N. Becker Stewardship Award, and the Florida EPPC was presented with the first ever NAEPPC Award for Excellence. The banquet, “A Night at the Opry,” was a celebration with food, drink, bluegrass music and the silent and live auction, culminating in the “prairie fire kit” auction, an NAA tradition, which ended as a tie between the

NAEPPC coalition and the mid-western NAA coalition (the long-standing winner of the prairie fire kit at the NAA Banquet). Bidders involved in the prairie fire kit auction enjoyed their hard-won shots of tequila as Mike Farris (winner of the Americana Music Association’s 2008 New and Emerging Artist of the Year award) and the Roseland Rhythm Revue took to the stage for a one hour set of rocking gospel and rhythm and blues music to close the banquet. The party continued afterwards in the honky tonks on Lower Broadway.

The 35th Annual NAA Conference and 1st NAEPPC Conference provided training and networking opportunities, and brought together some of the foremost experts who shared their knowledge at the plenary and concurrent sessions. Audio and PowerPoint™ presentations are accessible on the NAA ([www.naturalarea.org](http://www.naturalarea.org)) and NAEPPC ([www.naeppc.org](http://www.naeppc.org)) websites. The plenary session was videotaped and can be viewed, as well.

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