FOREST HEALTH
PROGRAM

GEORGIA FORESTRY
COMMISSION

Cogongrass in Georgia
Spring 2020 Update

Mark McClure, Forest Health Specialist

2020: Warm Winter Brings Early Cogongrass Bloom

The Georgia Forestry Commission has begun the 14th year of its campaign to fight the exotic, invasive weed known as cogongrass. Twenty three new detections have been confirmed from January 1, 2020 through March 10, 2020 in Georgia, bringing the statewide cumulative total to 1,374 cogongrass spots. This number is equal to the 23 detections made during this same time period in 2018 yet 61% greater than the 14 detections made during this same time period in 2019.

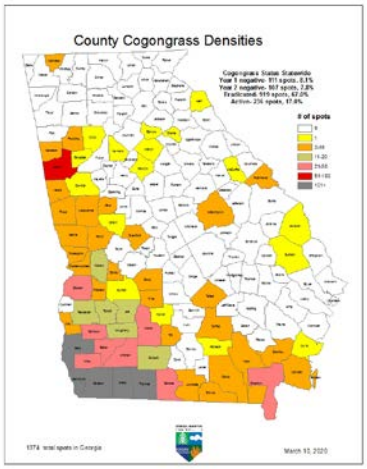
The above average warmth and rainfall during fall and winter of 2019-2020 are contributing to early cogongrass “green-up” and flowering. Therefore, landowners managers are urged to monitor their properties, especially pine woodlands, looking carefully for the presence of this invasive grass.

New detections have been reported by landowners, registered consulting foresters, loggers, prescribe burn practitioners, and personnel from the Georgia Forestry Commission and Department of Natural Resources.

All new sites are located in the southwest and southern regions of the state. The map below displays the 11 counties reporting new spots in 2020. Counties with new detections include: Decatur-12, Worth-2, Baker-1, Brooks-1, Calhoun-1, Camden-1, Charlton-1, Lowndes-1, Miller-1, Mitchell-1 and Seminole-1. Spot size this year has ranged from 0.02 acres to 1.1 acres, with an average of 0.21 acres.

Georgia Forestry Commission to Recognize Most Cogongrass Detections by an Individual in 2020.

The GFC Forest Health staff will recognize the individual who reports the most cogongrass spots with a gift! Therefore, all landowners and resource professionals are encouraged to continue searching their properties for cogongrass during the 2020 calendar year. The fluffy, white flowers appearing in spring between March and May enhances visibility and identification. Continue reporting detections to your local Forestry Commission county office, or directly to your regional Forest Health specialist. Bryan Cottles, Decatur County Ranger with the Georgia Forestry Commission, was the cogongrass detection winner in 2019.



Cumulative Cogongrass Detections per County:

The map at left shows cogongrass densities across the state of Georgia. The southwest region of the state is Georgia's epicenter, with Decatur, Seminole Early, Thomas and Grady Counties having the greatest activity.

Physical Characteristics Associated with Identifying Cogongrass:

Spring flowering season is the most common time to detect cogongrass infestations. Cogongrass primarily flowers between April and early June. The white, fluffy seed heads are visible from a distance. However, the distinct golden brown coloration in late fall through winter following frost makes cogongrass visible during the colder months of the year as well. Cogongrass is most difficult to detect during the growing season, yet throughout the year, the most distinguishable feature of cogongrass is its dense, sharp, pointed rhizome root system. Therefore, it is recommended to dig the rhizomes to make a positive identification.

How to Identify Cogongrass Flowers?

Cogongrass shoots are beginning to emerge. It's time now to begin looking for cogongrass in its flowering stage. The flowers are between two and eight inches long, with light, fluffy dandelion-like seeds that are white in color and cylindrical in shape. Flowering time is dependent on the local climate, but usually occurs from late March through early June. The photos below show cogongrass flowering at its peak dispersal period.

Besides Flowering, What are Key Identification Features?

Rhizomes: Dense mat, sharp-pointed, covered in flaky scales, bright white under scales, strongly segmented.

Leaves: Two to five foot long blades, between a half- and one-inch wide, off-centered white mid-rib, margins finely serrated, green/yellowish-green in color in summer, with a tan color in winter.

Circular growth pattern: Grass areas will normally grow in a circular pattern.

What Other Common Species Resemble Cogongrass?

Vasey Grass: Flower/seed head not fluffy, but loosely branched and spreading. Leaves arise from apparent stem. Base is thick and flattened, often with a reddish-purple color. Plant is very bunched in appearance. Contains a thin root system, not extensive, and lacking thick, segmented rhizomes.





Silver Beardgrass: Looks very similar but often somewhat branched and blooms later in the year (June-August). Leaves are not serrated and arise from an apparent stem. The midrib is not as apparent. The plant base has a strongly bunched appearance, with apparent stems. Root system is fibrous, lacking rhizomes.

Broomsedge: Flower/seed head is thin and sparsely flowered, blooms in late summer. Leaves are thin and often curled, and arise from an apparent stem. The plant base has a strongly bunched appearance, with very apparent stems. The root system is fibrous, lacking rhizomes.





Johnsongrass: Flower/seed head is not fluffy, but loosely branched and spreading. Leaves are wider than cogongrass, edges are not serrated. The plant base is rounded, but very thick in comparison to cogongrass. The plant does not appear bunched. The rhizome system is not as extensive. Rhizomes lack scaly coverings. This information was taken from the brochure entitled "Field Guide to the Identification of Cogongrass". Detailed descriptions along with color photo images are shown in the brochure.

How do I Report Cogongrass? To report a new potential cogongrass spot, contact your local Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) office or your regional Forest Health specialist. The GFC will continue spraying cogongrass in 2019 at no charge to the landowner. Landowners are required to sign a spray agreement with the Georgia Forestry Commission to legally allow resource professionals to access the property and spray the identified cogongrass. All positive detections are monitored annually until eradicated.

Where can I find additional information on cogongrass?

For additional information, visit the following webpages:
Georgia Forestry Commission at www.gatrees.org
http://www.cogongrass.org/
www.bugwood.org
www.gainvasives.org

Forest Health Specialists:

Program Coordinator
Chip Bates
18899 US Hwy. 301 N.
Statesboro, GA 30461
(o)912-681-0490
cell 912-536-7544
cbates@gfc.state.ga.us

North Region
Lynne Womack
3086 Martha Berry Hwy, NE
Rome, GA 30165
(o) 706-295-6021
Cell 912-515-5180
lwomack@gfc.state.ga.us

Southeast Region
Chris Barnes
5645 Riggins Mill Rd.
Dry Branch, GA 31020
(o) 478-751-3491
Cell 912-601-7093
cbarnes@gfc.state.ga.us

Southwest Region
Mark McClure
2910 Newton Rd.
Albany, GA 31701
(o) 229-430-5122
cell 229-869-8592
mmcclure@gfc.state.ga.us