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Invasive Cogongrass Confirmed in Arkansas

LITTLE ROCK, AR – The Arkansas Department of Agriculture is notifying the public that a new invasive grass species, Cogongrass, has been confirmed in Arkansas for the first time.

For several years botanists and land managers have been on the lookout for Cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*) in southern Arkansas. This aggressive species, native to Southeast Asia, has spread rapidly across the Deep South over the past few decades. Cogongrass is considered one of the worst invasive species in the world, causing both economic and ecological damages that impact forestry, agriculture, rangeland, and natural ecosystems.

Charles Bryson, retired U.S. Department of Agriculture botanist, detected a patch of Cogongrass in Helena-West Helena alongside Highway 49. The Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission, the Arkansas Department of Agriculture's (Department) Plant Industries Division and Forestry Division, and the Arkansas Department of Transportation were informed of the finding and met onsite on June 16 to spray the invasive plant population with herbicide. Botanists with the Arkansas Department of Transportation conducted surveys along Highway 49 and other roads in the area and detected no additional Cogongrass populations. The agencies are planning to conduct annual surveys along this and other routes coming into southeastern Arkansas from Mississippi. They will also monitor the site and conduct additional herbicide applications as needed over the next few years.

Cogongrass has bright green leaves with serrated margins and a distinctive white vein that is slightly off-center from the middle of the leaf. It has no true, above-ground stem and the leaves emerge directly from stout, creeping rhizomes (underground stems). Cogongrass spreads rapidly from these rhizomes to form distinctive and very dense circular patches which expand in size every year and can displace all other species on the ground. It is also one of the few warm season grasses that bloom immediately after coming out of winter dormancy. A fact sheet with more information and photos is available at <http://southernforesthealth.net/plants/cogongrass/cogongrass-biology-and-management-in-the-southeastern-u.s.>

Any sightings of Cogongrass in Arkansas should be reported to Paul Shell, the Department's Plant Inspection and Quarantine Program Manager, at paul.shell@agriculture.arkansas.gov or 501-225-1598.

The Arkansas Department of Agriculture is dedicated to the development and implementation of policies and programs for Arkansas agriculture and forestry to keep its farmers and ranchers competitive in national and international markets while ensuring safe food, fiber, and forest products for the citizens of the state and nation. Visit agriculture.arkansas.gov. The Arkansas Department of Agriculture offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability and is an Equal Opportunity Employer.