Cogongrass
*Imperata cylindrica*
One of the World’s Worst Weeds Invades Texas Forests

**Common Names:** cogongrass, blady grass, santintail, alang-alang, kunai, paillotte

**Identification**

- **Description:** Cogongrass is a perennial, rhizomatous plant in the grass family (Poaceae) that grows approximately 2 to 4 or more feet in height. The leaves are about an inch wide, have a prominent white midrib, and end in a sharp point. Leaf margins are finely toothed and are embedded with silica crystals. The lower surface of the leaf blade is often hairy near the base; the upper is hairless. The white plume-like flowers are arranged in a silvery, cylindrical, branching structure, or panicle, about 3 to 11 inches long and ½ inches wide. Cogon grass reproduces both vegetatively and from seed. In spring, a single plant can produce up to 3000 seeds per seed head that may be carried great distances by the wind. Vegetative spread of cogon grass is aided by its tough and massive rhizomes that may remain dormant for extended periods of time before sprouting. Rhizomes can grow from 1.5 to 3 meters per year.

- **Habitat:** Cogongrass is a hardy species, tolerant of shade, high salinity, moisture and drought. It grows in coastaland, disturbed areas, natural forest, planted forests, range/grasslands, riparian zones, scrub/shrub lands, urban areas, and wetlands.

- **Ecological Impacts:** Cogongrass is considered one of the 10 worst weeds worldwide and a pest in 73 countries. It can invade and overtake disturbed ecosystems, forming a dense mat of thatch and leaves that make it difficult for other plants to coexist. Large infestations of cogon grass can alter the normal fire regime of a fire-driven ecosystem by causing more frequent and intense fires that injure or destroy native plants. Cogongrass displaces a variety of native plant species used by native animals (e.g., insects, mammals, and birds) as forage, host plants and shelter. Some ground-nesting species have been known to be displaced by the dense cover that cogon grass creates.

- **Spread Identification:** Cogongrass was accidentally introduced to the U.S. at Mobile, Alabama, in 1911 as packing material in shipping crates. It was also planted in Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi in the 1920s as a forage grass and for erosion control. However, it has no value as livestock feed and is too invasive for erosion control. Conservative estimates are 500,000 to 1,000,000 infested acres in Alabama, Mississippi and Florida. Cogongrass is a Federal Noxious Weed, which prohibits its importation and interstate movement. Cogongrass spreads both by seeds and by rhizomes. A single plant can produce thousands of seeds each year. The small, fluffy seeds can be dispersed up to 15 miles by wind.

- **Animals, equipment, vehicles, contaminated seed and hay, and people also spread cogongrass. The rhizomes can be spread in contaminated fill dirt and on equipment that hasn’t been thoroughly cleaned. People leasing their land to hunters from Florida, Louisiana, Alabama or Mississippi or hiring vendors from these areas should insure that equipment is clean before allowing them on their property.**

**Control and Management:**

- **Manual:** Multiple cultivations will eradicate congongrass, however mowing and burning stimulates the growth and spread of the rhizomes. Cogongrass can spread in contaminated fill dirt and on equipment that hasn’t been thoroughly cleaned. People leasing their land to hunters from Florida, Louisiana, Alabama or Mississippi or hiring vendors from these areas should insure that equipment is clean before allowing them on their property.

- **Chemical:** It can be effectively controlled using any of several readily available general use herbicides such as glyphosate in September or October with multiple applications to re-growth. Revegetation may be necessary following herbicide treatment, to prevent soil erosion and to help reduce reinfestation by cogon grass. It is crucial that applications be made in early fall. Follow label and state requirements for herbicide applications.