

FLORIDA

Pilot Cogongrass Treatment Cost-Share Program

Technical Guidelines



Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services – Division of Forestry

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Table of Contents

A. Introduction	3
B. Program Objective	3
C. Eligibility Requirements	4
D. General Program Requirements and Guidelines	4
E. Treatment Guidelines and Requirements	5
F. Application and Program Procedure	7
G. Funding Availability and Priorities	9
H. Failure to Complete Approved Practices	10
I. DOF Foresters: Time Accounting and Forest Stewardship	10
J. Division of Forestry Offices	10

Pilot Cogongrass Treatment Cost-Share Program Technical Guidelines

A. Introduction

Cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica* L.) is a non-native, invasive grass which is established in Florida and several other southeastern states. In addition to being regulated as a state and federal noxious weed, cogongrass is a pest plant in 73 countries, and has been recognized as one of the “Top 10 Worst Weeds in the World.” Cogongrass infestations negatively affect tree regeneration, growth, and survival, as well as wildlife habitat, native plant diversity, and forage quality. They also increase the risk of wildfires, and alter fire behavior.

Cogongrass tolerates a wide range of site conditions, and can quickly colonize both disturbed and undisturbed areas, both by seed and by the growth of its thick rhizome. New infestations are often started by unintentional spread of seed or pieces of rhizome in contaminated fill dirt, or on equipment used for mowing, logging, grading, or site preparation. Once established, cogongrass spreads rapidly by the growth of its rhizomes, forming thick, often circular patches in which few other plants can establish.

Steps should be taken to avoid spreading cogongrass to new areas, by using only non-contaminated fill dirt, careful sanitation of equipment that has been operating in infested areas, and avoiding soil disturbance that runs through infested areas and into uninfested areas. Once the plant has established, it can be eradicated by the thorough and repeated use of herbicide treatments.

B. Program Objective

The primary objective of the Pilot Cogongrass Treatment Cost-share Program is to reduce the spread of cogongrass to new areas by helping private landowners control or eradicate existing infestations. Toward this end, the program offers non-industrial private landowners up to 75% reimbursement toward the cost of approved herbicide treatments of cogongrass infestations over a 2-year period. This program is administered by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Division of Forestry (DOF) and is funded through grants from the USDA Forest Service.

C. Eligibility Requirements

Eligible Ownership Types: For the purposes of this program, a **landowner** includes any **individual or entity** (e.g., partnership, corporation, company, trust, etc.) that legally holds ownership of the land indicated on the application. The landowner is defined as the name(s) and Taxpayer Identification Number entered on the federal W-9 form that is submitted with the program application. The name(s) on the W-9 form should be the same name(s) entered on the program application, and should be the name(s) that appear on the deed or other document of title evidencing ownership of the land.

Only private non-industrial landowners with property in Florida may apply to this program. These landowners may include private individuals, joint owners, non-profit organizations, or corporations that do not have publicly-traded stock. Ineligible owners include lands controlled by federal, state, and local governments; corporations with publicly-traded stock, or public utility companies.

Location: Due to funding limitations, this pilot program will place first priority on properties located in the nine counties adjacent to the Georgia border: Baker, Columbia, Gadsden, Hamilton, Jackson, Jefferson, Leon, Madison, and Nassau. If funds are still available after all eligible applications from those counties have been accepted, the program may be extended to applications from the following second-priority counties: Bradford, Calhoun, Clay, Duval, Holmes, Liberty, Suwannee, Taylor, Union, Wakulla, and Washington.

D. General Program Requirements and Guidelines

- **Cost-Share Rate:** Applicants who meet the eligibility requirements listed above may receive reimbursement for 75% of the actual cost (based on submitted receipts or invoices) of herbicide treatment (including labor and materials), but payment will not exceed \$100 per acre for each year of treatment, or \$200 per acre total over the two-year treatment period. If the total area of all infestations to be treated on a property is less than one acre, the maximum cost share amount will be \$100 per year (\$200 total).
- **Maximum Payment:** First priority will be given to applications for treatment of up to 5 acres of infested area, for a maximum cost-share payment of \$500 per year (\$1,000 per 2-year contract period). Applications for treatment of larger areas will be considered at a lower priority if sufficient funding is available.
- **Application Period:** Applications may be made during a specified, announced sign-up period. If all available cost-share funds are not allocated during the sign-up period, it may be extended. Only one application per landowner is allowed during the 2-year treatment period (see Section C above for the definition of “landowner”).
- **Landowners with Multiple Ownerships:** If an individual owns land (in full or in part) in the name of more than one legal landowning entity, that individual should submit an application on behalf of only one of those landowning entities. If it is determined that an

individual is represented as owner on more than one application per year, the Division of Forestry reserves the right to approve only one of those applications.

- **Prior practices:** Any practices performed prior to application approval are not eligible for cost-share reimbursement. Each landowner will be notified in writing when his/her application has been approved.
- **CRP Landowners:** Acreages enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), or other programs that may prohibit receipt of federal cost-share funds from more than one source for the same acreage, are not eligible for treatment under this cost-share program.
- **Two-Year Treatment Requirement:** The infested areas that are accepted under this program must be treated for at least two consecutive years, unless complete eradication is achieved after the first year of treatment. In such cases the landowner must acquire an on-site confirmation from a DOF forester, who must notify the Program Coordinator in writing. Failure to abide by this requirement will result in the recapture of cost-share payments.
- **Effectiveness Requirement:** The herbicide must be applied in a manner and formulation that will result in at least 95% of the visible, above-ground cogongrass foliage showing visible wilting and/or death, with no visible resprouting, at 6 weeks after each treatment. The effectiveness of the treatment will be evaluated by the **DOF forester** before the practice is approved for reimbursement of costs. Treated areas that do not show the required 95% treatment effectiveness will be deducted from the final payment acreage.
- **Access requirement:** Only infestations for which the entire contiguous infested area (plus a 10-foot buffer) can be treated will be eligible for cost-share funding for treatment through this program. If an infestation extends into adjacent private property or a public right-of-way, a Hold Harmless Agreement form signed by the adjacent landowner or authorized public land manager must be provided with the application, authorizing access to and treatment of the entire infestation. Adjacent landowners or public land managers will not be required by this program to bear any portion of the cost-share applicant's responsibility for the treatment costs.

E. Treatment Guidelines

1. **Herbicide selection recommendations:** Treatment with glyphosate (Roundup, Glypro, Accord, etc.) and imazapyr (Arsenal, Chopper, Habitat, etc.) have been found to be effective in controlling cogongrass. The choice of herbicide will depend largely on the presence of desirable non-target vegetation (such as trees) in the treatment area. Generic versions of these herbicides are effective, and can greatly reduce treatment costs. The following recommendations are offered:
 - a. **For treatment of areas with trees or other desirable vegetation:** Glyphosate herbicide can be used in a 3% solution (3.84 fluid ounces of herbicide concentrate per gallon of water). A surfactant is not necessary when treating cogongrass with glyphosate alone. Glyphosate has no residual soil activity, however **it should be**

considered non-selective when sprayed on any green plant tissue such as leaves or green stems. Non-target plants that are sprayed on such tissues may be injured or killed.

- b. For areas where selective treatment is not needed:** Imazapyr herbicide (Arsenal, Chopper) may be used in a 0.5% solution (0.64 fl. oz. per gallon of water) with a surfactant (0.125 fl. oz. per gallon, or 0.5 oz. per 4 gallons). A surfactant is necessary for effective treatment with imazapyr. **Imazapyr has residual soil activity, therefore it can harm non-target plants on the site through root uptake, and can injure or kill new vegetation planted on the site too soon after treatment.** Imazapyr (plus surfactant) may also be combined with the glyphosate solution described above.
- 2. Herbicide application:** Herbicide solution may be applied with backpack sprayers or a similar manual spraying apparatus, or with sprayers mounted on a tractor or other vehicle. This treatment may be conducted either by the contract holder, or by a contractor hired by the contract holder (the **DOF forester** can provide a list of known contractors available for your area, if desired). The herbicide solution should be sprayed to thoroughly cover all cogongrass foliage, and drench it to the point where excess solution runs off the plant material. The treated area must include a buffer strip extending 10 feet beyond the visible edge of the infestation, to kill runners that may be hidden from view.

All herbicide applications must be applied in a manner consistent with the label requirements. The herbicide applicators should have and properly utilize all appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

- 3. Timing of treatment:** The herbicide treatment is most effective if applied when cogongrass is actively growing. **For this program, treatments must be applied in late summer or early fall, between August 15 and October 20 of each treatment year.**
- 4. Other treatment preparations:** Other pre-treatment preparations that may increase the effectiveness of the control treatment may be considered by the applicant/contract holder in consultation with the DOF forester and/or other resource management professionals. **However, the costs for such preparations will not be reimbursed with any cost-share funds through this program.**
- a. Prescribed burning:** Research has shown that the use of a prescribed burn to reduce thatch prior to treatment can increase the effectiveness of herbicide on cogongrass infestations. However, cogongrass fires can burn unusually hot and fast, and should only be considered with a great deal of preparation and planning, and conducted with extreme caution.
- b. Mechanical treatment:** Mowing or tilling the site may also increase the effectiveness of herbicide treatment on cogongrass after it resprouts, by reducing dry thatch material. However, these treatments should be avoided when the cogongrass is producing seed heads, and care must be taken to clean all equipment after using it in an infested area, to avoid the spread of seed or rhizomes to new areas.

F. Application and Program Procedure

- 1) The **applicant** obtains (from a Division of Forestry office) a copy of the Pilot Cogongrass Treatment Cost Share Program Technical Guidelines (this booklet), an application form, Hold Harmless Agreement forms (if applying for treatment of infestations that extend onto adjacent landowners' property) and Federal W-9 form*.

*In order to process your application and pay you under this agreement, the State of Florida - Department of Financial Services has advised that a Taxpayer Identification Number is required. Therefore, please complete a Federal W-9 (Request for Taxpayer Identification Number and Certification) and return it with your application. The form is also available at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fw9.pdf>.

- 2) The **applicant** contacts the **forester** to receive practice recommendations and/or assistance with completing the application form and a tract map. The tract map must include a north arrow, map scale, applicant's name, section-township-range (STR) of property, the property boundary, and the locations and sizes of the infestations clearly outlined and labeled, and access roads into the property.
- 3) If any infestations to be treated extend onto adjacent public or private land, the **applicant** contacts the adjacent property owner or authorized land manager, who will complete and sign a Hold Harmless Agreement form, giving permission to access the adjacent property and treat the entire contiguous infested area.
- 4) The **applicant** requests a site visit from a **DOF forester**, who verifies the size and location of the cogongrass infestations to be treated, and that the proposed treatment is feasible. The **DOF forester** will mark the boundaries of the infestations (including a 10-foot buffer) with flagging and/or tree marking paint. The **DOF forester** will record the latitude and longitude and size of each location, and use this information to create the tract map. Both the **DOF forester** and the **applicant** sign the application form under the section labeled "Initial Project Approval."
- 5) The **DOF forester or applicant** mails the signed application and the tract map to the **program coordinator** at the Forest Health Section:

Pilot Cogongrass Treatment Cost-Share Program
c/o Dr. Ed Barnard
Florida Division of Forestry
1911 SW 34th Street
Gainesville, FL 32608
- 6) The **program coordinator** reviews the application materials and approves (or denies) the cost-share request. If approved by the program coordinator, the program coordinator signs the application form, assigns a project completion date to the application (October 20, 2010), and forwards it to the DOACS Division of Administration.

- 7) Once the application is approved by the Division of Administration and returned to the program coordinator, the **program coordinator** will mail duplicate originals of the application, along with written notification of approval, to both the **applicant** and the **DOF forester**. These should be kept on file by both the forester and the applicant until project completion. The applicant should not begin implementing the treatment until this written notification of approval is received.
- 8) If the application is denied by either the program coordinator or the Division of Administration, the **program coordinator** will notify the **applicant** and **DOF forester** in writing explaining the reason for denial. Incomplete application packages will be returned.
- 9) After receiving written approval, the **applicant** (now the **contract holder**) is responsible for seeing that the approved practice is carried out according to all treatment and program requirements (see Sections D and E above). Practices must be completed by the completion date assigned by the program coordinator on the application form. The **contract holder** or contractor shall complete the **Herbicide Application Record Form** indicating the dates of treatment, the types and rates of herbicides applied, and the areas treated. Upon completion of the practice, the **contract holder** contacts the **DOF forester** to schedule a performance check for six weeks after the treatment was applied. After treatment, no mowing or other mechanical disturbance should be applied in the treated area before the performance check has been carried out.
- 10) The **DOF forester** revisits the property (bringing the application form) and verifies that the previously identified areas have been treated, and that at least 95% of cogongrass foliage in the treated areas is visibly wilted or dead, with no visible resprouting. The **contract holder** shows the DOF forester documentation (original receipts and invoices) of all practice costs incurred, with total costs clearly indicated. If the **contract holder** has performed the treatment him or herself, then he or she should create an invoice documenting the value of labor, materials and equipment used in the treatment (a sample format for a landowner-generated invoice can be provided by the **DOF forester**). Clearly legible copies of all documentation, including the Herbicide Application Record Form, must be included with the returned application form.
- 11) If the practice has been satisfactorily completed, the **DOF forester** verifies that the remaining items on the application form are filled out correctly. The following procedures should be followed for each of the two treatment years:

Year 1:

- The **DOF forester** will make two copies of the original application form and maps, for the **forester** and the **contract holder** to retain.
- On the original application form, the **forester** fills out the “year 1” columns for acres treated, cost incurred, and payment requested.
- The **contract holder** and the **DOF forester** sign the form under the section labeled “**Partial Payment Approval.**”
- The **forester** mails the signed original application, along with copies of all receipts and invoices, to the program coordinator at the address in #5 above.

Year 2: The same procedure as above is followed, except that the **DOF forester** fills out the “year 2” columns for acres treated, cost incurred, and payment requested, and the **forester** and **contract holder** sign the form under the section labeled “**Final Payment Approval.**”

If the **forester** determines that the practice has not been completed satisfactorily, the forester can request a site evaluation from the Forest Health Section to determine if partial or complete deduction of cost-shared acreage is warranted.

- 12) The **program coordinator** reviews documents and, if approved, forwards the necessary information to the Division of Administration for processing of payment. After processing, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services will issue a check to the contract holder. Payment will be for 75% of costs for approved treatments, not to exceed \$100 per acre per year, or \$100 per year for treatments of less than an acre total. All areas should be estimated to the nearest tenth (0.1) acre.

G. Funding Availability and Priorities

The Pilot Cogongrass Treatment Cost-Share Program is supported by limited federal and state grant funding. Applications from eligible land owners will be prioritized according to the following rank criteria (in order of importance):

1. Applications within the 9 target counties (Baker, Columbia, Gadsden, Hamilton, Jackson, Jefferson, Leon, Madison, and Nassau) will receive first priority. If funds are still available after all eligible applications from those counties have been accepted, the program may be extended to the second-priority counties: Bradford, Calhoun, Clay, Duval, Holmes, Liberty, Suwannee, Taylor, Union, Wakulla, and Washington.
2. Applications for treatment of 5 acres or less of infested area will receive first priority. Within that group, applications for treatment of smaller areas will receive higher priority.
3. Applications for treatment of infested areas that are located within 1 mile of land managed or preserved by a **public agency or non-profit organization** as a park, forest, or other protected natural area.
4. Applications from landowners who have an existing multi-resource management plan for the property, including the proposed treatment areas.
5. Applications for which the applicant (with the assistance of the DOF forester or other resource management professional) has prepared a written Practice Plan for the herbicide treatment.

If a submitted application cannot be approved due to insufficient funds, the landowner will receive a letter from the project coordinator or coordinator indicating 1) that the application has been placed on file, and will be funded according to the above ranking criteria once more funds become available, or 2) that the program has been discontinued indefinitely and if it is re-instituted, landowners will be required to re-apply.

H. Failure to Complete a Practice

Contract extensions will not be offered for this program. If the contract holder determines that the practice will not be conducted, he/she should notify the DOF forester. The DOF forester should write the word CANCELED across the top of his/her copy of the application form and send it to the program coordinator. If the herbicide treatment for the first year is not conducted within the required treatment period (August 15 to October 20), the contract will be considered canceled. Funds for canceled practices may be re-allocated for other purposes related to the control of cogongrass in Florida.

The treatment must be repeated for a second year, unless complete control of the infested areas is achieved after the first year of treatment, as confirmed by the DOF forester on a visit to the site after August 1 of the second year. **Failure to do so will result in recapture of funds that were awarded for the first year of treatment.**

I. DOF Foresters: Time Accounting and Forest Stewardship

Foresters should record all time spent on activities related to this program in the appropriate DOF time accounting system (e.g., CARS).

Foresters should encourage participating contract holders with 20 acres or more of forest land to also participate in the Forest Stewardship Program and have a stewardship plan developed for their property.

J. Division of Forestry Offices and More Information

To contact the DOF county forester or DOF office nearest you, consult the state government section of your phone book, or visit the web at www.fl-dof.com.

For more information about cogongrass and other non-native invasive pest plants, visit the Forest Health Section page on the website above, under the Forest Management heading. Additionally, information regarding invasive species in Florida may be found at www.floridainvasives.org.