



Opinion on Cogongrass Infestation of Phosphate Mining Sites

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The issue of cogongrass is long and complex. The damage cogongrass does to wildlife in natural systems is easier to address than the damage it does in the vastly and perhaps permanently altered soils and hydrologic regimes of mined lands. There has been and continues to be a question as to the ultimate wildlife value of mined lands. The rapid spread and dominance of cogongrass in disturbed soils and its invasion and dominance of undisturbed soils in the more natural areas of Florida is deeply disturbing to all who value the ecosystems of native Florida. It is a major concern as well to those who have hope that restoration of mined lands might eventually become a more positive contributor to the natural ecosystems in Florida. Since the spread of cogongrass most often begins and flourishes in disturbed soils research to find reasonable controls in the highly disturbed ecological regimes of mined lands is very important especially to those who value diversity in Florida.

As to the specific question re. wildlife impacts, the whole logic behind the tens millions of dollars spent each year by Federal, State, Regional and Local Governments to manage the invasive plants in Florida boils down to protection of the existing ecosystems from invaders that would drastically alter the habitats upon which wildlife and man depend. For wildlife that means protection of the diversity of plants and animals that they depend on for survival. For man that means protection of both aesthetic and economic values of this land.

In discussing and addressing the seriousness of this cogongrass infestation issue, the Florida Chapter of the Sierra Club believes that the following statements by Mr. Timothy King must be considered. Mr. King is a wildlife manager by training and an individual who has committed ~20 years to reclamation of phosphate mine lands for the only wildlife and habitat agency in Florida – the Game and Fish Commission:

"I've not seen any authoritative estimates of damage from cogongrass, but I've certainly seen the results. It appears to me that the young, emerging communities of reclaimed or restored sites are particularly vulnerable. I would personally estimate that the effective habitat loss approaches 100% for the affected area. Not only will the cogongrass shade-out all other ground cover but, when the stand inevitably burns, the fire is so hot that it can easily kill the emerging trees."

Richard Coleman, Chair
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