

Give 'Em an Inch and They'll Take a Mile

By [Gwyn Ingram](#) on Feb 2, 2010



Japanese climbing fern...Photo: Ronald F. Billings, Texas Forest Service, Bugwood.org.

ARRA funds lay the groundwork in a fight for the forest floor.

Nearly everyone who has visited the Southeast (even briefly) is familiar with kudzu. Not so fondly referred to as "the vine that ate the South," kudzu was introduced to the United States in the 1800s as an ornamental plant and was later cultivated for erosion control. But in the receptive Southeastern climate, kudzu took off. Capable of growing at the rate of almost a foot per day, the vine swallowed whole forests, depriving them of sunlight.

Kudzu was one of the first plants in the Southeast to supply a ready visual in the minds of a public new to the idea of invasive species.

But it's not alone. Non-native invasive species (NNIS) abound across the nation, many of them innocently introduced for their attractive garden qualities, benefits to wildlife or soil stabilization. Not all non-native plants are invasive, but those that are can escape cultivation and multiply to unmanageable levels, causing ecological or economic damage by dramatically changing the natural landscape. In turn, vegetation that historically sustained local wildlife and native ecosystems disappears -the wildlife and other desirable natural resources soon follow.

Across the nation, invasives such as yellow starthistle threaten not only forest resources, but also outcompete valuable agricultural crops and rangelands and choke the water sources that supply them.

How did we get to this point? It's certainly important to choose carefully the plants you grow in your own garden, but the success of many aggressive invasive plants is the result of more than just the occasional seed carried by a bird from your backyard.

"Factors such as fragmented land ownership patterns and old homesites contribute to the spread of NNIS," said Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests (FMS) Botanist and Ecologist Robin Mackie. "So mapping their distribution is a critical first step towards implementing more effective controls."

In South Carolina, invasive species and the problems associated with them are growing and spreading vigorously. Now, with dollars supplied to FMS by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), the agency can actively seek out pockets of NNIS and take steps to slow their spread before they further thier foothold on coastal and inland forested environments.

Contracted crews have surveyed more than 6,400 acres of forest land on the Sumter National Forest and mapped NNIS on a quarter of them. NNIS found and mapped included Chinese privet, Autumn olive, Chinese stiltgrass and Japanese honeysuckle, in addition to kudzu, Chinese wisteria, Chinaberry, mimosa, tree-of-heaven, multiflora rose, tirfoliate orange, sericea lespedeza, periwinkle and English ivy.

On the Francis Marion National Forest, nearly 1,300 acres surveyed resulted in 125 infested acres. Japanese climbing fern was found in 213 of 217 polygons mapped. It is a species that spreads rapidly by spores that can travel by wind, water, clothing or fur. Like kudzu, it can occupy and threaten forested areas, and has done just that on tens of thousands of acres in Florida.

To date, the four districts on the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests have prepared just over 1,100 acres for two annual invasive species treatments, prioritizing control of non-native invasive plants within areas of



Chinese privet... Photo: Karan A Rawlins, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org.

special Forest Service interest and concern: floodplain canebrakes; open woodlands; longleaf ecosystems; the wild and scenic river corridors; and contiguous tracks of Forest Service ownership.



...and kudzu. Photo: Kerry Britton, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org.