

THE EXOTIC PEST PLANT COUNCIL

Brian Bowen, President
Tennessee Exotic Pest Plant Council

ABSTRACT. The Exotic Pest Plant Council (EPPC) is a proactive organization established to raise awareness about the threat posed by invasive exotic pest plants in natural areas and acts to stop the continued spread of invasive species. EPPC provides fora for sharing information and provides networking opportunities regarding all matters concerning this issue. EPPC was first established in Florida in 1984 and has since become established in California, the Pacific Northwest, and Tennessee. These independent organizations have formed the National Association of Exotic Pest Plant Councils. The different EPPCs share many similar goals. In Tennessee, EPPC hosts annual symposia, conducts workshops, and publishes a quarterly newsletter. TN-EPPC has published the Tennessee Exotic Pest Plant list classifying the state's most invasive plants, and has published the Tennessee Exotic Plant Management Manual. TN-EPPC acts in a technical advisory capacity and has helped establish rules for quarantine of exotic pest plants while working to get government agencies out of the business of planting exotics.

The Exotic Pest Plant Council (EPPC) was established in Florida in 1984 in response to invasive exotic plant problems that at the time were not being addressed there. A coalition of agencies emerged that eventually led to the formation of the Exotic Pest Plant Council. This coalition initially focused much of its attention on the control and management of *Melaleuca*, which today, continues to be a serious problem in South Florida, including the Everglades.

Presently, this organization is comprised of four states and/or regional independent Exotic Pest Plant Councils in Florida, California, the Pacific Northwest, and Tennessee. In October 1995, these four organizations met in California and signed a Memorandum of Understanding, which established the National Association of Exotic Pest Plant Councils (NAEPPC). This affiliation of EPPCs was formed to address issues that go beyond state or regional boundaries that all of us concerned about this problem recognize. The NAEPPC interests in Washington D.C. are represented by Dr. Faith Campbell, who is presently serving as the technical secretary for the National Association of EPPC.

This discussion will primarily focus on aspects of the Exotic Pest Plant Council pertinent to the eastern region, specifically Tennessee. Some discussion will be given to the NAEPPC and its related goals. The genesis of TN-EPPC, established in March 1994, was made possible by the support received from Florida and California. The Pacific Northwest EPPC was formed only months before the TN-EPPC. Interestingly, the MOU, which was signed establishing the NAEPPC in 1995, recognized that one of its areas of collaboration is to facilitate formation of new state or regional EPPCs. The broadening of TN-EPPC's interests to become a regional council is presently under consideration. There has been much interest expressed by other groups outside Tennessee to explore the option of organizing a southeast regional EPPC. This eastern regional conference helps provide a great opportunity for that to possibly be advanced.

The NAEPPC identified four goals and three areas of collaboration which are as follows:

- To improve the Federal Noxious Weed Act to include weeds of natural areas and other pertinent enabling legislation;
- To increase biological control funding;
- To promote good weed control by federal and other land management agencies and organizations using current technologies, including mechanical and chemical methods;
- To improve the methods of prevention of new infestation for exotic pest plants from importation into the USA and through interstate movement.

Areas of collaboration are as follows:

- To implement strategies to increase membership for EPPCs to gain greater support;
- To implement strategies to increase funding to raise awareness of this issue; and
- To implement strategies for formation of new state or regional EPPCs.

This last area of collaboration was actually in effect before the MOU was signed. In establishing TN-EPPC, Florida provided modest funding and a representative to speak at an exploratory meeting held at Vanderbilt University in November of 1993. Florida had also been participatory in California's formation in 1992 as CALEPPC held a similar exploratory meeting. The exploratory meeting at Vanderbilt led to a recommendation that a committee be formed charged with the task of evaluating whether an Exotic Pest Plant Council should be established in Tennessee and to define what some of its goals might be (many of these goals had been defined as a result of the exploratory meeting). This committee determined that formation of this council should be recommended if there was sufficient statewide support. It was determined that this could be tested by hosting the first annual Tennessee Exotic Pest Plant Symposium in March of 1994.

This meeting was held at Cheekwood Botanical Gardens in Nashville, only a few months after the exploratory meeting. Dr. Peter White gave the keynote address focusing on the homogenization of the world's flora citing the predilections of the English ecologist Charles Elliot in the 1950s. This first annual symposium also included many other speakers invited back today to address this eastern regional conference. At this symposium, CALEPPC's support was significant. Dr. John Randall was our luncheon speaker the afternoon that TN-EPPC officially became an organization. Dr. Randall, co-founder of CALEPPC, gave a very good account of how CALEPPC was established and what it had accomplished. His encouragement helped us take the next step, which was to form our statewide organization.

A steering committee was formed at this symposium to write the by-laws and explore how non-profit tax-exempt status could be gained. This committee basically evolved into the first TN-EPPC board of directors. Our federal 501C3 non-profit status was attained during our first year, which was a very important accomplishment. The by-laws were also completed soon after TN-EPPC was established. Development of the by-laws and mission was facilitated by borrowing heavily from CALEPPC and Florida's by-laws and mission. There was no reason to reinvent the wheel. The mission and goals of TN-EPPC are:

- To raise public awareness about the spread of invasive exotic plants into Tennessee's natural areas. This is an on-going goal that is perhaps the most important function of this organization. This goal is a part of almost everything that TN-EPPC does;
- To facilitate the exchange of information concerning management and control of invasive exotic plants;
- To provide a forum for all interested parties to participate in meetings and workshops, and an annual symposium to share the benefits from the information provided by TN-EPPC;
- To serve as an educational, advisory, and technical support council on all aspects of exotics; and
- To initiate campaign actions to prevent future introductions.

These goals are similar to the other EPPCs, and represent work in progress. The objectives to accomplish these goals include hosting annual symposia, which TN-EPPC has done since 1994. This year's annual symposium is this regional conference co-hosted by the US Forest Service and its numerous co-sponsors. This regional event demonstrates how EPPC forms partnerships to accomplish these goals whenever possible. Our annual events raise awareness of the issue, and give members opportunities for networking and sharing information.

Information is also shared through TN-EPPC News, which is a quarterly newsletter published since the spring of 1994. TN-EPPC has recently gone on-line with its own home page. The Tennessee Exotic Management Manual has been published to aid resource managers by providing recommendations on how to control and manage 20 of Tennessee's worst pest plants. This manual is especially useful as TN-EPPC sponsors training workshops and makes presentations at other meetings and conferences. TN-EPPC has published the Tennessee Exotic Pest Plant List, which helps target species for control, alerts restorationists to potential problem species, informs the public, and aids those commenting on environmental documents. This helps track new threats by receiving information on exotic plants with unknown status.

Educational materials include the three regional Landscaping with Native Plant brochures for grand regions of Tennessee. The brochures provide information about native plant use as an alternative to exotic plants. The brochures have been highly acclaimed and cited by the popular magazine, "Horticulture." Educational and advisory assistance has been provided to USFS in their production

of the "Plants Out of Place" film. TN-EPPC serves in a technical advisory capacity working to get government out of the business of planting exotics.

TN-EPPC has helped to initiate campaigns to stop the spread of invasive exotics. TN-EPPC has worked in cooperation with the Environmental Action Fund (the lobbying organization for Tennessee's environmental organizations) to amend the Exotic Pest Bill in the Tennessee Code Annotated to define exotic pest plants. This enabling language authorizes the Commissioner of Agriculture to quarantine exotic pest plants. TN-EPPC was influential in getting quarantine orders drafted for purple loosestrife and tropical soda apple.

While much still remains to be done, much has been completed since TN-EPPC's inception in 1994. The urgency to continue raising awareness and acting to stop the spread of invasive exotic pest plants is imperative. Unless we are able to make the changes necessary to stop new introductions and work hard to manage and control those species that have already become established, we will not succeed. It is my hope that those of you at this conference will become involved in helping us deal with this serious problem. An important role you can play is through the Exotic Pest Plant Council. The EPPCs welcome your support and participation.