

Native Habitat at Risk

Non-Native Weed Takes Root

In 2004, deeprooted sedge (*Cyperus entrerianus*), a non-native weed from the wetlands of Argentina, was barely on the radar of Texas farmers and environmental groups like Legacy Land Trust, a non-profit conservation organization which partners with Precinct 4 in protecting natural areas like Little Cypress Creek Preserve. “One year, deeprooted sedge couldn’t be found on one of our tracts. The very next year, it had covered an entire 20 acres,” says Jennifer Lorenz, executive director of Legacy Land Trust.

This rapid rate of distribution today poses a major threat to native plants along much of the southeastern United States. “Deeprooted sedge is much more aggressive than our native plants,” says David Rosen, botanist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). “One mature plant can produce up to one million seeds a year.”

A Threat to Wildlife, Farming

Deeprooted sedge likely found its way to the U.S. as a contaminate in rice seeds or on livestock. While it is a wetland plant in its native Argentina, the weed has proved amazingly adaptable, occurring even in dry habitats in Texas.

“It’s so tenacious that it’s choking out native plant species,” Rosen relates. This loss in habitat threatens to carry up the food chain. “If we lose the native plant habitat, we can expect insect diversity to decrease. That, in turn, will affect the food source for local and migra-

tory songbirds. If this weed spreads as it has been, we could eventually see a loss in wildlife.”

The weed could also negatively impact farming communities as well. The seeds are distributed from field to field on farm equipment, road construction equipment, equipment used for roadside mowing, and even on the feet of cattle. While a research consortium out of Stephen F. Austin State University is studying control methods, Rosen says that, for now, the focus is on education and early detection and control. “Our goal right now is to get the word out to farmers and natural resource managers. Early detection is key to controlling the spread of deeprooted sedge.”

For more information on deeprooted sedge, contact David Rosen at (281) 286-8282, or e-mail at David_Rosen@fws.gov.



While unlikely to affect area lawns in the near-term, the spread of deeprooted sedge on fields and farmlands could have a substantial impact on wildlife and farming communities. Shown, deeprooted sedge with seed pods which easily take flight when not disposed of properly. Photo by David Rosen, USFWS