SE-EPPC Grant Project Wraps Up

By Kathryn Wilson

The Southeast Exotic Pest Plant Council (SE-EPPC) received a U.S. Forest Service grant in 2011 to explore multiple topics related to SE-EPPC chapter processes and the use of available resources. The four tasks associated with the grant included:

1. Collect the methodology used to generate state invasive plant lists from all participating State EPPC organizations.
2. Assist in the development of means to evaluate and enhance data entry into EDDMapS [the Early Detection and Distribution Mapping System] by SE-EPPC participating states and agencies.
3. Develop recommendations for a protocol to better facilitate the annual sharing of new invasive plant listings in SE-EPPC participating states.
4. Provide an analysis of the current status of Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMAs) across the Southeast.

All of these tasks are reliant on stakeholder feedback. For this reason, it was decided that a survey would be an excellent means of gathering information about SE-EPPC chapter members' use of tools and resources. In addition, interviews with experts in the field would provide a foundation for background information and further recommendations.

General Survey Results

The stakeholder survey was sent to each of the SE-EPPC Chapter presidents for dissemination to their email lists; it was also sent to the SE-EPPC list-serv. There were 220 complete responses.

Of the 220 respondents, nearly half were from Florida (47%, n=104). Following were Georgia (15.5%, n=34) and Alabama (14.5%, n=32). From there, a marked decline in responses occurred with 8% from South Carolina (n=17), 4% from Kentucky (n=8), 4% from North Carolina (n=8), 4% from Tennessee (n=8), 2% from Mississippi (n=5), and 2% from "other" states. While there were many respondents from Florida (likely due to the large number of active individuals on the FL-EPPC list-serv), all of the SE-EPPC states are at least represented in the survey results.

Respondents were asked what organization they represented within their SE-EPPC chapter, with the intention of exploring the public vs. private sector make-up of SE-EPPC participants. The most numerous type of organization was a public entity or agency (n=97), which included federal, state, county, city, and municipal governments. Following public agencies was private citizens (n=53). It is important to note that respondents were asked to write in their organization, and many wrote in multiple identities (e.g. "state agency and private citizen," or "interested citizen and business owner"). Thirty respondents indicated that they represent a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) such as a particular chapter of the Native Plant Society, an EPPC chapter, or conservancies. An additional 26 respondents reported affiliation with a University (e.g., faculty, student, Extension Service). Finally, 22 of the respondents indicated that they were in the private sector, most of which were environmental consulting firms, vegetation management companies, or herbicide applicators.

Regarding how active each respondent reported to be in their SE-EPPC chapter, 28% thought themselves to be "somewhat active" (n=62) followed by 24% being "not at all active" (n=53). While these responses are self-reported and not physically observed by an outside party, the number of those who consider themselves "not at all active" is interesting, given that this organization is largely a volunteer effort. See Table 1 for a breakdown of responses.

Plant Listing

Where purpose statements are included with chapters' plant lists, they consistently emphasize education, management guidance, and a non-regulatory nature. In addition, a companion-document, clearly showing a decision-tree, flowchart, and/or criteria for species lists for each state, has become common. Transparency and defensibility of the listing process follow. It is highly recommended, therefore, that all chapters use these experiences to provide a clear statement of purpose with their lists, to include:

Table 1: Reported level of activity with SE-EPPC chapter.

Individual Level of (self-reported) Activity with SE-EPPC Chapter	Percentage & Frequency
Very active	13.2% (n=29)
Somewhat active	28.2% (n=62)
Neither active nor inactive	16.8% (n=37)
Somewhat inactive	17.7% (n=39)
Not at all active	24.1% (n=53)

a) Education, management, and non-regulation, and
b) A publicized ranking protocol that promotes public understanding and list objectivity.

List structure varies from state-to-state. Each chapter approaches the details of its list as their immediate and foreseeable needs require. Some consistency in list structure across the southeast will support a broader scale approach to common problems, while the ability of individual chapters to effectively address their unique issues remains paramount.

A relatively simple way to increase chapter listing methodology transparency would be to prepare and make accessible a guideline for interested parties on the listing process. This guideline should be easy to use and provide the reader with a comprehensive understanding of how species are grouped or listed. A map of different regions in the state is also a helpful way to depict ways in which states categorize different species.

The following attributes have been compiled from the list methods and experiences of all chapters of SE-EPPC: 1) Category (severity of threat); 2) Species' physiognomy, land- and cultural-use significance, and/or general habitat descriptor; 3) Eco-region, physiographic, or climatic province where species occur; 4) Regulatory status of species: federal (if any), home state, and neighboring states; 5) Distribution maps directly accessible as links to EDDMapS; 6) Risk assessment protocol outlines; 7) Management recommendations for species; 8) Criteria worksheets.

The survey respondents were asked their opinion regarding whether or not increased consistency among states' invasive plant listing methodologies (e.g., whether an invasive plant is considered a high, medium, or low risk) would be an improvement. Of the 164 who answered the question, a strong majority reported that they thought states' should have increased consistency in listing methodologies (57%, n=93), followed by 37% believing that "maybe" it would be good (n=61) and only 6% (n=10) indicated that it would not be an improvement.

As a follow up question, respondents were asked to write in the pros and cons of increased consistency among states' invasive plant listing procedures and criteria. Fifty-four respondents wrote in all pros about increased consistency. Those in favor most commonly indicated that consistency was positive, it provided a more defensible list, and raised awareness. Forty respondents wrote in both pros and cons to increased consistency, and while the pros were much like those previously mentioned, the cons included the different conditions associated with different states, economic impacts, and the additional work required to make the methodologies more similar. An additional 25 respondents wrote in only cons, and were not in favor of increased consistency.

Respondents were asked if they thought the invasive plant listing process was controversial in their state. While many who are interested in the issue and on the listserv may not be very "active" on the board or with listing procedures, the SE-EPPC board thought it would be interesting to measure perceptions of controversial listings. Given that the highest response was "do not know" (47.5%, n=77), it is clear that most of those represented are not active or knowledgeable in the listing process. This was followed by 27% who indicated that there had been listing controversies (n=44) and 25% who thought that there had not been controversies (n=41).

Respondents were asked if, to the best of their knowledge, their state chapter experienced good participation in listing activities. A strong majority of 59% (n=92) indicated that they did not know, followed by 33% believing that they did have good participation (n=52) and 8% that their state chapter did not have good participation in listing activities (n=13).

EDDMapS

EDDMapS is a very valuable tool for reporting new occurrences of invasive species and tracking known populations. Of the 151 survey respondents who answered the question, a strong majority of 58% (n=88) reported that they use EDDMapS. This was followed by 24.5% (n=37) who do not use EDDMapS and an additional 17% (n=26) who "did not know" if they used EDDMapS (which suggests that they do not). The following five questions were answered only by those who responded that they used EDDMapS (n=88). When asked how often they used EDDMapS, 41.5% reported that they use it "sometimes," which was followed by "frequently" and "not very often" (*see Table 2*).

Respondents were asked an open-ended question about any issues that they have experienced with EDDMapS. Of the 67 who responded, 50 said they had not experienced any problems with the resource. Many of them included comments about how much they appreciated EDDMapS or that they had an issue that was resolved quickly. Seventeen of the respondents did report an issue. These comments were either general such as "a few glitches now and then" or focused on a particular issue such as "yes, specifically with the iPhone app." There were also comments about issues that had been resolved.

Respondents were asked if they provided follow up information to EDDMapS once they reported an infestation. Commonly, follow up information includes updated information or treatment results. Of the 83 respondents

Table 2: Frequency of EDDMapS use

Frequency of Use (EDDMapS) N=82	Percentage	Frequency
Frequently	34.1%	n=28
Sometimes	41.5%	n=34
Not very often	24.4%	n=20

who answered the question, 36% (n=30) did not know if they provided follow up information (which suggests that they probably did not). *See Table 3.*

Table 3: Frequency of Respondents Who Provide Follow-Up Information to EDDMapS

Follow up Information to EDDMapS (N=83)	Percentage	Frequency
Do not know	36.1%	n=30
No	22.9%	n=19
Yes	18.1%	n=15

Next, respondents were asked if they or their organization utilized outputs from EDDMapS (most commonly in the form of maps or Excel spreadsheets). Forty-four percent of the 85 who answered the question responded that they did utilize outputs (n=37), compared to 34% who did not (n=29) and 22% that did not know (n=19).

Finally, respondents were asked what three things could be done to increase their use of EDDMapS. This was an open-ended question that all survey respondents were asked to respond to (e.g., not just those who indicated that they use EDDMapS), of which 68 responded. A majority of respondents provided a comment about "finding time to use [EDDMapS]" knowledge, or awareness regarding EDDMapS usage (n=45). Some respondents (n=23) provided specific entry or output suggestions while others mentioned workload or funding (n=14). Finally, comments were provided regarding the EDDMapS app or mobile device (n=10) as well as information related comments (n=10) such as suggestions to send more email updates, alerts, etc.

Many SE-EPPC and state chapter supporters and participants are using EDDMapS as a data entry tool. However, there seem to be barriers regarding available time, perceived work involved in using the tool, and confidence required to ensure that users understand how it works and can take advantage of the resource and its benefits. Although nothing can really be done about the individuals' time available to use EDDMapS, it is apparent from the survey results that there are opportunities for enhanced awareness, knowledge, and advertising of the resource. Survey results also indicate that many users are not aware of the outputs available. This may be alleviated by the aforementioned recommendation to both advertise more and provide more training opportunities.

Sharing

While most chapters do share updates to invasive plant lists as well as new listings and Weed Alerts, there is no standard practice yet adopted by SE-EPPC to promote a more coordinated effort for sharing information. In consultation with the *Wildland Weeds* editor, and without creating any additional resources for sharing when there are adequate ones in place, the recommendation is to announce invasive plant updates in issues of *Wildland Weeds*. *Wildland Weeds* is the official publication of the SE-EPPC and all affiliated chapters.

Survey respondents were asked if they thought this would be a good idea to promote more sharing of information. Of the 133 that responded, over 90 indicated that it was a positive idea that would likely lead to better coordination and awareness of invasive plant listing activities. Very few indicated that they did not think this was a positive idea. Other ideas to promote a more consistent sharing process included promoting an online resource or website (n=37) such as listservs, social media, and the SE-EPPC website. An additional 49 provided "other" suggestions including reaching out to other groups such as foresters, partner organizations, land managers, anglers, hunters, legislatures/policymakers, etc.

CWMAs/CISMAs

Based on interviews with experts in the field, the status of Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMAs) and Cooperative Invasive species Management Areas (CISMAs) was explored. It was determined that the following 11 factors were important to the status of CWMA-type organi-

Table 4: Measures to Improve Success of CWMAs/CISMAs in the Southeast

Measures (to improve number/success of CWMAs/CISMAs)	Percentage	Frequency
Sustained funding	33.2%	N=73
Increased education/awareness of invasive species issues	31.8%	N=70
Increased education/awareness of CWMAs/CISMAs	31.8%	N=70
Enhanced coordination between states/agencies	28.2%	N=62
Increase in available cost share funds	27.3%	N=60
Developing & maintaining effective leadership	25.0%	N=55
More pilot/demo projects	23.2%	N=51
More volunteers	18.2%	N=40
Better policy	10.0%	N=22

zations in the Southeast (especially compared to the West): 1) Organization: There are no County Weed Supervisors in the Southeast; 2) Lay of the land: Most of the open land in the Southeast is forest; 3) Lack of government ownership/ownership patterns; 4) No motivating sense of crisis; 5) Lack of funding; 6) Lack of leadership; 7) Absentee land ownership; 8) Policy is way behind in the Southeast; 9) Different concepts of CWMAs; 10) Differences in size, circumstances and culture; 11) Florida is different (an exception to the rest of the Southeast).

Survey respondents were asked a few questions about their thoughts and experiences about CWMAs/CISMAs in their respective states. First, they were asked an open-ended question regarding whether CWMAs/CISMAs existed in their home state and if so, if they knew how many. Of the 91 respondents who answered, 60 reported that there were CWMA-type organizations in their state. Respondents were asked what they thought were the three barriers, if any, to implementing successful CWMAs in their state. This was an open-ended question that yielded 69 responses. Of these, the majority suggested that funding or resources were the number one barrier (n=66), which included such comments as "sustained funding," "staff shortages" or "funding for dedicated oversight of program." There were 20 comments regarding a need for enhanced communication or education, which could include simply knowing about the existence of CWMA-type organizations, general awareness of the issues, or related policies. Respondents provided 17 comments focused on leadership, or more specifically, a lack of leadership or "champions" for the cause. There were an additional 16 comments regarding the need for collaboration. Examples of collaboration comments included: "Getting diverse groups to work together," "Lack of interagency coordination," and "lack of 'buy-in' with private and local government land owners." In addition, there were 27 comments regarding other topics.

Respondents were asked to select from a number of ideas on how to improve the number and success of CWMAs/CISMAs in their home state. They were also encouraged to write in other ideas. Thirty-three percent (n=73) of respondents indicated that sustained funding would be the most important measure. This was followed by education and awareness of invasive plant issues as well as CWMAs/CISMAs themselves (*see Table 4*).

Finally, respondents were provided space to write any other ideas they might have to improve the number and success of CWMA-type organizations – not just in their home state, but across the Southeast. The 53 responses were varied, but most were comments and suggestions about funding, outreach and communication, leadership, increased coordination, awareness, and centralized structure.

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