

Instructions for IFAS Extension Faculty:

Using the IFAS Assessment of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas

The IFAS Assessment and its purpose

The IFAS Assessment of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas was developed so that IFAS Extension faculty can provide consistent recommendations concerning the use of non-native plants. The process by which such recommendations are derived is well-documented and open to review. The IFAS Assessment has three components. The main one is the Status Assessment and from this the use of the Predictive Tool or Intraspecific Taxon Protocol may be directed. All three components are available at: <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment/> along with a more detailed description of how the IFAS Assessment was developed.

When plant species¹ are assessed, data are collected by designated IFAS Assessment staff from all available resources. If a species is already prohibited by state or federal law no further assessment is needed because the species cannot be recommended for use. If species have not escaped into Florida's natural areas but are either recent arrivals to the state or are known to cause problems in areas with similar habitats and climate to Florida, the Status Assessment directs the use of a predictive tool. The Australian Weed Risk Assessment system has been adapted for use in Florida to complete the assessment of such species (http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment/pdfs/predictive_tool.pdf).

If a species has been documented in natural areas in Florida (excluding sites with recent human disturbance), the Status Assessment is applied to the species in each of three climate zones in Florida: north, central, and south. (A link to the lists of the counties in each zone is provided at the 'Florida counties sorted by assessment zone' link on: http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment/pdfs/assess_counties.pdf.)

Footnote:

¹ The Status Assessment is generally applied at the species level. It is only applied independently to infraspecific taxa (e.g., cultivars, varieties, or sub-species) if these taxa can be clearly distinguished in the field and are not likely to revert. (Throughout the Status Assessment and this document, reference to the species under consideration could also refer to such distinct infraspecific taxa.) Other infraspecific taxa may be proposed for assessment using the Intraspecific Taxon Protocol (http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment/intraspecific_taxon_protocol.html). This protocol uses the same conclusions as the Status Assessment so even though they are derived differently, the conclusions for these infraspecific taxa are reported with those for all species evaluated using the Status Assessment.

As the Status Assessment is completed, information is organized to provide Results that describe the status of the species for four specific topics:

Ecological impacts

Potential for expanded distribution in Florida

Management difficulty

Economic value

Such Results are reported as scores (for ecological impacts and management difficulty) and/or as a low or high status. For examples, see the Results Table at:

<http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment/pdfs/results.pdf>.

From these Results, Conclusions are derived which specify what recommendations can be made about the species. These Conclusions are:

- *Not a considered a problem species at this time and may be recommended by IFAS faculty (reassess in 10 years)*
- *Caution – may be recommended by IFAS faculty but manage to prevent escape (reassess in 2 years)*
- *Invasive and not recommended by IFAS faculty except for any “specified and limited’ use that has been approved by the IFAS Invasive Plants Working Group (reassess in 2 years)*
- *Invasive and not recommended by IFAS faculty (reassess in 10 years)*

If the species has not yet been assessed, the Conclusion is essentially that for a non-invasive species: - *Not yet assessed: not considered a problem species at this time and may be recommended by IFAS faculty. However, this Conclusion may be changed upon assessment; please check for updates since this publication in the Conclusions table at: <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment/conclusions.html>.*

When and how to report the IFAS Assessment

To achieve the stated goal of providing consistent recommendations, it is important that all IFAS Extension faculty members correctly report the Conclusions whenever appropriate. The instructions on the following pages specify the appropriate situations for citing the IFAS Assessment and indicate what must be reported.

Any questions about this process should be directed to Dr. Joan Dusky
jadu@ifas.ufl.edu

1. Authors of IFAS Extension publications MUST consult the most up-to-date IFAS Assessment Conclusions Table at <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment/conclusions.html> for any IFAS Extension document that:
 - a) Might use the term 'Invasive' to describe any non-native plant species occurring in Florida.
 - b) Discusses the current or potential distribution in natural areas of any non-native plant species in Florida.
 - c) Discusses the ecological impacts of any non-native plant species in Florida.
 - d) Recommends the control of a non-native species from natural areas in Florida.
 - e) Makes any explicit recommendations to use a non-native plant in Florida.
 - f) Makes any implicit recommendations to use a non-native plant in Florida (for example, listing species of plants suitable for encouraging butterflies).
 - g) Discusses the economic value of any non-native plant species in Florida.
 - h) Is a revision of a document that has previously cited the IFAS Assessment.

2. If the plant species under discussion in an IFAS Extension document is NOT included in the version of IFAS Assessment Conclusions Table that is current at the time of publication, it is not necessary to mention the IFAS Assessment. However, these species should not be termed "invasive". If the species is included in the Conclusions Table but is listed as "Not yet assessed" or if, for a non-listed species, a discussion of invasiveness, control, or distribution in natural areas is desired then the Conclusion cited above for "Not yet assessed" species should be included.

3. When a plant species is evaluated using the IFAS Assessment, Conclusions are derived about the acceptable uses of that plant in for each of three zones in Florida (north, central and south). If the plant species under discussion in an IFAS document receives the Conclusion '*Not a considered a problem species at this time and may be recommended by IFAS faculty*' for ALL three zones the author can choose whether to cite the IFAS Assessment or not. The document does not need to be reviewed by the IFAS Invasive Plant Working Group.

4. If a plant species under discussion in an IFAS Extension document receives any Conclusion other than '*Not a considered a problem species at this time and may be recommended by IFAS faculty*' for any zone to be covered by the document then:
 - a. Any recommendations in the IFAS Extension document **MUST** match the relevant IFAS Assessment Conclusions. If the document only has implicit recommendations (e.g., listing species of plants suitable for encouraging butterflies) then an explicit statement of the IFAS Assessment Conclusion(s) other than '*Not a considered a problem species at this time and may be recommended by IFAS faculty*' must be provided for any zones to which such Conclusions apply.
 - b. The IFAS Extension document **MUST** be submitted to the IFAS Invasive Plants Working Group for review. For such review, contact Dr. William Haller – IPWG Chair at wth@ifas.ufl.edu
 - c. The Status Assessment specifically addresses the topics of: *ecological impacts; potential distribution in Florida; management difficulty; and economic value*. If the IFAS Extension document contains discussion of these topics, then Results of the Status Assessment for those topics **MUST** be included. For example, "In the north zone this species has high ecological impacts and low potential for expanded distribution." Further examples are provided at the 'Examples of how to cite Conclusions and Results from the IFAS Assessment' link on: http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment/pdfs/citations_examples.pdf.

For any of the four topics listed in the preceding paragraph that are not discussed in the IFAS Extension document, the author can choose whether or not to report the Results of the Status Assessment for those topics. For example, in an IFAS Extension document that discusses the ecological impacts and management of a species, the Results for those two topics **MUST** be reported but the author may choose whether or not to report the Results about potential distribution in Florida or economic value.

5. If the IFAS Extension document only discusses certain counties within a single zone, then the author only needs to report the Conclusions for that zone. However, a comment must be included to indicate that this Conclusion is only for this zone (or county) and that other Conclusions may apply elsewhere in the state. Any subsequent adaptations or revisions of the document to make it apply to counties in other zones **MUST** then include the citation of relevant Conclusions for any zones addressed.

6. Only if the Conclusions for all three zones are the same, can a state-wide Conclusion for a species be cited. If there are different Conclusions for different zones, it is not permissible to cite only one of those Conclusions when referring to the state-wide (or non-specified) distribution of species.

7. Incomplete assessments:

The requirements for documenting evidence used in the Status Assessment are rigorous. If possible, published data are used but these are rarely available for specific zones. If field observations have to be used instead, at least three experts must provide written evidence. For species that are commonly found in natural areas, it is not difficult to accumulate sufficient information from each zone where the species occurs. However, some species are infrequent in undisturbed natural areas in some zones. Despite contacting many relevant experts (often 50 or more per species) sometimes we cannot find three experts who are familiar with a species in a particular zone. In such cases, after we have made all reasonable efforts, we will derive an Incomplete Conclusion for the species in a zone based on as much eligible evidence² as we have at that time.

We distinguish such Incomplete Conclusions and Results for a species and zone in the Conclusions tables using parentheses and in the Result tables using orange highlighting. It is hoped that the publication of Incomplete Conclusions and Results will encourage the submission of further expert observations. The assessment of a species and zone will be completed (and the Results and Conclusion may change) as soon as additional observations are reported. In the meantime, Incomplete Conclusions and Results should be cited in IFAS Extension documents with a statement to indicate that they are incomplete. (Examples are provided at the 'Examples of how to cite Conclusions and Results from the IFAS Assessment' link at http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment/pdfs/citations_examples.pdf)

Footnote:

² For a detailed explanation of what constitutes 'eligible evidence' see the description of "Documentation of Evidence" in the glossary at the end of the Status Assessment at http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment/pdfs/status_assessment.pdf.