

**Northwest Florida Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area
Minutes for the Inaugural Meeting - October 14th, 2009**

Attendees:

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Justin Jones	TNC	jjones@tnc.org
Lindsey Wood	FWC	Lindsey.wood@myfwc.com

Introduction (Justin Jones): The purpose of the meeting is to give a basic idea of CISMA's, discuss the benefits of a CISMA in our landscape, and discuss how it will operate.

Background (Justin Jones): GCPEP was formed to slow the loss of longleaf pine habitat. Consists of 9 public and private partners working under memorandum of understanding. Partners agreed that a CISMA could assist in managing invasives using strategies identified by the Invasive Species Subcommittee. The Nature Conservancy received funding to develop a CISMA in the western panhandle through a Department of Defense Legacy Grant.

Successful CISMA's (Kris Serbesoff-King):

Kris led introductions of attendees, then gave a presentation titled "Thinking Locally, Acting Neighborly" on behalf of Florida Invasive Species Partnership (FISP). FISP encourages public / private partnerships as a landscape level approach to battling invasive species. The focus is to increase efficiency and effectiveness of prevention and control. The FISP website is www.floridainvasives.org, and features a list of funding agencies for invasives management. The website is a portal for knowledge about invasives management. Trying to use top down and bottom up approach for invasives management; Also provides training for land managers.

CISMA's are partnerships to manage invasives; idea of CISMA began in the Midwest and Western US. Cooperative Weed Management Area Cookbook is a source for descriptions on the essential characteristics of CISMA's. Characteristics include: defined geographical area; representative of the majority of landowners within the area; has a steering committee; commitment to cooperation; works off a management plan. Benefits of CISMA include: they transcend individuals who may leave a landscape; they avoid reinventing the wheel; they allow for more efficient work, including crossing boundaries for invasives management (both physically and through strategy, i.e. working with private landowners). CISMA participants share a common vision, build community awareness, encourage best management practices, and facilitate early detection and rapid response. CISMA work days have been very effective in Northeast Florida, and have proven important leveraging financial and personnel resources. CISMA's attract grants that look for partnership approaches, making landscape level choices.

How it works: partners adapt the CISMA model to their area, make decisions together. Kris gave an overview of CISMA's in the state and how they function. Take home message: pick projects you can complete and want to work on cooperatively.

Question: Are there any CISMA's in Alabama? Unknown. AL just got money for cogongrass eradication; GA is its own CISMA.

Question: How would this CISMA be involved in cogongrass projects? By making sure people are aware of the money / projects. A problem was that private landowners didn't know about DOF funding, or trainings with Extension Agents. We can use the CISMA to get the word out.

Question: Do any states have mandated buffer zones around natural areas? E.g., Long Island Invasive Management Area does, but Kris doesn't know about state mandates. Some counties have done so.

Discussion: Local Benefits of a CISMA (All)

- DOT - reduce the high maintenance cost caused by reinfestations.
- DOF - expand public awareness of invasive presence.
- Escambia County - public awareness; need incentives for private landowners to remove invasives.
- Infestations can lower property value - this can be an incentive for private landowners (esp. cogongrass which is highly detrimental for forestry practices).
- FWC - explain eradication as a public safety issue (e.g., cogongrass as a fire hazard).
- FWC- fight invasives that impede native species (e.g., gopher tortoise).
- Allow for treatment across property boundaries
- UF- for research, need to know what the emerging issues are. CISMA could help identify research ideas and perhaps leverage funding from USDA, etc for invasive species research.
- FWC – CISMA’s can assess problems on a landscape scale and work on an attack plan. One way to show funding is well-spent, start on a small area to show you can do well to leverage funding.
- Educate landscaping contractors; public awareness of what not to plant. Education focus for landscaping business owners
- DoD - urban interface; Eglin can’t approach landowners, but CISMA could help. Contact homeowners associations. Pay attention to location of meetings for landowners.
- Sea Grant - combine eradication and education efforts; point out programs for landowners; also focus on water resources.
- Knowledge of what individual agencies are doing.
- FWC - in order to get money from FWC have to identify private landowners adjacent to public lands. CISMA’s can be informed and can contact landowners when the public land managers cannot. Tax dollars are being focused on the same areas because infestations from private lands keep infesting public lands.
- NRCS – help decide what private lands to apply funding towards; landowners may own land but have limited resources.
- DOF - focus on borrow pits, both public and private.
 - FWC partnering with FNAI to identify and survey public and private borrow pits throughout state- focusing especially on cogongrass corridor in north.
 - FNAI ten year survey- available on FNAI website on conservation lands.
- Engage private landowners, such as large forestry companies. Engage people who are always working with private landowners. Model could be old farmers coop. Vendors.
- BRF - Develop an outreach plan - identify multiple medias for disseminating information. Identifying audience would also be included in this outreach plan.
- DOF – develop an educational program for municipal/county maintenance workers/road crews, as well as contractors.
- Provide invasive points of contacts for agencies and their jurisdictional boundaries.

What are the limiting factors within your agencies to participating in the CISMA?
Money

Lunch break 1220-120pm.

Discussion: Initial Decisions (All):

What are options to start work as a CISMA?
Work days, especially on public lands.

What potential CISMA partners are missing?:
Utility companies (Escambia River Electrical Coop, Gulf Power, Chelco)
Municipalities
CSX
Contractors
Other DEP agencies/CAMA/Greenways and Trails
Forestry/timber management
FWS
Keep America Beautiful, Clean and Green
UWF
FNPS
Audubon

What should the CISMA boundaries be?
Escambia, Santa Rosa, Walton, Okaloosa, Holmes, Washington.
Should counties in AL be considered as well?
Encourage them to form their own. Travel an issue.

Voted on Name: Northwest Florida CISMA

How often should we meet?
Once a quarter for now; rotate meeting between counties.

How will the CISMA make decisions?
A decision-making process including a steering committee and subcommittees or ad-hoc committees. Establish committees at next meeting. Jones asked people to think about who from each agency could be a part of a steering committees

Strategic plan: 5-year plan is a deliverable for DOD Legacy Grant due 7/1/10
Identify priorities, and make an action-driven plan. Identify outputs, and develop a plan with short-term goals versus long-term goals. Send out minutes to allow people to identify which committee they want to be a part of.

FWC's IPMS Upland Funding Program (Matt Phillips):

Funding mechanism for public land managers for exotic plant control. Annual meeting in panhandle. Land manager develops plan, FWC ranks each submitted plan. Available on floridainvasives.org website as well as FWC website under habitat tab. Funded projects available on website. Panhandle gets about \$1 million per year. Must be public land. Send contractors out to land, not a grant program. Have often used FWS Partners Program as a match.

Jones hands out FWC county DOT worker plant identification guides

Wrap-up. Next meeting: possibly Jan/Feb. EDRR system (EddMaps) training available with Chuck Bergeron, likely a part of the next meeting. A website for the Northwest Florida CISMA will be developed through FISP.