

08-17-07

## **Southern Group of State Foresters – Issue Paper**

### **Subject:**

#### **Forest Health – Invasive Species**

### **Situation:**

The South is host to an increasing variety of invasive plants; insects and diseases that if not addressed effectively, will continue to result in significant economic losses to landowners and ecological damage to already stressed forested ecosystems. Every Southern state is threatened by or afflicted with one or more forest disease, insect or invasive plant problem. Invasive pest species effects are exacerbated by lack of timely treatment, climate extremes, overly dense forest stands, lack of control technology and other factors. Mortality caused by invasive pests increases fuel loading, thereby increasing the risk of catastrophic wildfires. Coordination among public agencies on these issues will be necessary to their successful management

### **Background:**

Most invasive pest species are not native to the South or the U.S., but have either escaped captivity (gypsy moth) or have been introduced accidentally from other countries (balsam and hemlock woolly adelgids, chestnut blight, cogongrass). These have caused serious ecological damage and economic loss to affected landowners and communities. The southern pine beetle, a native but invasive insect when at outbreak levels, continues to plague much of the pine belt in the South, particularly during drought conditions. All landowner types are affected. Shrinking industrial ownership is likely to affect this situation as forest conversion proceeds and management styles of new owners change. Since 2003, approximately \$60 million has been given to 13 states and 12 National Forests to accomplish prevention and restoration activities. In that time, nearly 400,000 acres have been treated on federal, state, and private lands with an additional 125,000 acres targeted in 2007

### **Relevance to the South:**

The Southern Forest Resource Assessment (SFRA) discussed in detail the nature and extent of numerous invasive species in the region and provides a factual basis for action. Given the economic and ecologic significance of Southern forests and the forces of change acting on them, careful attention to forest health issues will be critical.