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EASTERN BACCHARIS

NATIVE INVASIVE MOVING INLAND

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Eastern baccharis (*Baccharis halimifolia*), also known as saltbush, groundsel tree, or groundsel bush, was once confined to coastal areas of Alabama and neighboring states. Some believe that Hurricanes Ivan and Katrina may have played a role in dispersing it northward as far north as Walker County, Alabama. As with other invasive species, hunters from South Alabama and Florida may have transported it on their trucks, tractors, and implements. I have personally observed it as far north as near Columbiana in 2-3 year old plantations, edges of woods and fields, and at Wal Mart of all places. Next door to our office in Montgomery, Burger King is pruning theirs like an ornamental!

This bush or small shrub can grow from 5-12 feet tall, with one to several stems, and is generally not noticed until fall when flowers appear. At that time, the shrub is a white showy bloom with many flowers producing seeds that are white and hairy, much like dandelion or thistle. Seeds are easily dispersed by the wind and grow anywhere they can get direct sunlight. The leaves are alternate and somewhat leathery, semi-evergreen, bright green to grayish, 1-3 inches long, and one-quarter to one-half inch wide, variable in shape from diamond to oval or egg. Large leaves are coarsely toothed on the upper half; smaller leaves near tips of male and female trees appear together and are easily cut with a saw or machete, but sprouts must be controlled.

It is important to know that eastern baccharis is poisonous to cattle. They generally find it unpalatable, although it may be attractive to them when other foliage is not available during winter months and drought periods. It provides a poor-to-moderate browse for white-tail deer. While I have seen them eat privet and wax myrtle when they do not have other foliage, I have not seen them browse these plants on our property.

This invasive first came to my attention on the 60-acre property in southwest Butler County that my wife and I purchased a few years ago and have worked to improve. Coming across an unfamiliar rather rugged-looking shrub, I did some research and

determined it was probably eastern baccharis. Cutting a piece of the bole, I brought it to the office where it was officially confirmed as such by other foresters. Then I began searching for a cure, but only Dr. Nancy Loewenstein, Extension Specialist at Auburn University School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, had one. “Burn it,” she said.

Well, this presented a bit of a problem for us, as we had a stand of hardwood and pine that had been clearcut 15 years ago and was left to regenerate naturally. This stand was very open when hurricanes drove up through Alabama in 2004 and 2005, providing a perfect environment for the seed to germinate. Interesting to note – no baccharis was growing in a separate 25-acre pine plantation that has been burned in the last three years, proving Dr. Loewenstein’s cure.

Although I asked several individuals about chemical control, no one has discovered a good solution. Dr. Loewenstein and other professionals recommend Triclopyr ester, which is found in several brand names. I tried spraying glyphosate on a small bush, which took three times before it died. I found that using a surfactant and dye will improve your chances of being successful in killing it. Apply to cut stems with oil on the stump and sides, basal cuts to the bole of plants, or foliar applications. Good luck!🙏

Sources:

Alabama Cooperative Extension System Bulletin, “Eastern Baccharis (Baccharis halimifolia) Identification and Control” by Dr. Nancy J. Loewenstein, Research Fellow IV and Extension Specialist, School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, and Stephen F. Enloe, Extension Weed Specialist, Department of Crop Soil and Environmental Sciences, Auburn University. <https://sites.aces.edu/group/timelyinfo/Documents/TIS%20eastern%20baccharis%20-%20final.pdf>

‘Ponderosa II’ field tests and eradication efforts by Walter and Annette Cartwright – Stewardship Forest, Tree Farm, and TREASURE Forest in Butler County, Alabama.