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Invasive Plants – Coming to America.

New Approaches for Early Detection and Rapid Response to Invasive Plants in the U.S.

Randy G. Westbrooks, Ph.D.

Invasive Species Prevention Specialist
U.S. Geological Survey, Biological Resources Discipline
National Wetlands Research Center
233 Border Belt Drive
Whiteville, NC 28472

Phone: 910-648-6762 **Fax:** 910-648-6763

E-mail: rwestbrooks@usgs.gov



Biographical Sketch:

Randy Westbrooks, a native of Gaffney, South Carolina, received his B.S. and M.S. degrees in biology from the University of South Carolina (1976/1978), and his Ph.D. in Botany and Weed Science from North Carolina State University (1989). Since 1979, Dr. Westbrooks has served as an Invasive Species Prevention Specialist with the U.S. Government, in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as well as the Department of the Interior.

Internationally, Dr. Westbrooks is working to develop a **Global Early Warning System for Invasive Species** – in cooperation with the **IUCN Invasive Species Specialist Group**, based in Auckland, New Zealand.

On the domestic front, Dr. Westbrooks is working with numerous interagency groups to develop a **National Early Detection and Rapid Response System for Invasive Plants** in the United States. Currently, the effort is focusing on the establishment of **State EDRR Coordinating Committees** to lead the development of local, state, and regional elements of the National EDRR System.

These include **Trained Volunteer Networks** [early detection and reporting of new invaders, modeled after the Invasive Plant Atlas of New England ([WWW.IPANE.ORG](http://www.ipane.org))], **Regional Invasive Plant Atlases** (Data collection and synthesis; e.g., IPANE), **State Invasive Species Councils** (interagency coordination), and **Invasive Plant Task Forces** (eradication of confirmed invaders). The **Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force**, which was established in 2003, is one of the most successful EDRR projects so far.

As part of a new effort to train a new generation of field professionals to address the problem, Dr. Westbrooks is currently partnering with **Southeastern Community College** in Whiteville, North Carolina, to develop and offer a new **Invasive Species Management Technician Training Program** – starting in the spring of 2008. The new program includes five online courses covering all facets of invasive species management, including prevention, exclusion, detection, containment, eradication, and control; as well as a ‘hands on’ student internship where concepts and principles covered in the program are put into practice. The program will be offered as a new second year focus of the **SCC Environmental Science Technology program** for resident students or as a ‘stand alone’ certificate program for invasive species management field personnel.

Dr. Westbrooks’ Motto is: *Partnerships Now.... Weeds Won’t Wait!*