

SWOSU Student Monitoring Giant Grasses

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Giant grasses can cause giant problems. Southwestern Oklahoma State University student Jayme Tuck of Weatherford is learning exactly how and could use the help of area residents.

Tuck recently received an \$150 award as part of the first-ever small grants program of the Oklahoma Invasive Plants Council (OkIPC). Her project involves studying the extent and spread of giant reed in and around Weatherford. Her work is also funded through the SWOSU Biology Guy Hagin Endowment.

She recently presented her preliminary findings at the Oklahoma Natural Resources Conference in Tulsa. Tuck presented her findings about how the grass, currently on the OkIPC “watch list,” has caused problems in other parts of the country, yet is underreported in western Oklahoma.

At the conference, OkIPC President Priscilla Crawford presented Tuck with the grant award while emphasizing the importance of monitoring plants as Tuck is doing. Tuck was the only undergraduate who presented during the invasive species symposium as part of the three- day conference. Dr. Lisa Castle, who mentors Tuck, also presented, highlighting the work of SWOSU biology students in monitoring trees of heaven and Johnson grass, two other species known to cause environmental and economic damage outside of their native ranges.

Giant reed, which can grow over 12 feet tall along alleys in Weatherford, has been planted in the past as a privacy screen. When the wind-dispersed plant spreads along creeks and waterways, however, it can choke out native vegetation, is poor wildlife habitat, and can be extremely difficult to remove.

For area residents who have seen giant reed near Weatherford, please contact Dr. Castle at SWOSU (lisa.castle@swosu.edu) to add information to Tuck’s on-going mapping effort.