

African Feathergrass (*Pennisetum macrourom*)

November 2015



Image credit: Susan Lawrie

African Feather grass dominates riparian areas

African Feathergrass invades pasture and native vegetation and is a declared weed under the *Natural Resources Management Act 2004* (NRM Act).

Description

African Feathergrass is a tufted, perennial, tussock grass that grows up to 2 m high. The plant forms dense clumps and spreads rapidly by a vigorous rhizome system.

Leaves are light green and strongly ribbed on the upper surface. They are darker green underneath and sometimes purplish along the edges and tips. Leaves grow up to 1.2 m long and 1.2 cm wide.

Stems are erect, cylindrical and hairless. They grow to a length of 2 m with several stems emerging from a single tussock.

Flowers are purplish, yellow or brown. The flower spike is 10 to 40 cm long and surrounded by 1 cm long feather-like serrated bristles.

The roots are dense and fibrous, growing to a depth of 1 m. Rhizomes can grow up to 2 m long and produce new shoots along their length.

Impacts

African Feathergrass invades watercourses and wetlands where it forms a dense cover and displaces native vegetation. It can invade native grasslands and grassy woodlands, particularly where the vegetation is disturbed or degraded.

African Feathergrass is a poor competitor in well managed pastures. However it can become established in overgrazed pastures. It has low nutritional value and is avoided by stock, allowing it to grow to high densities that severely degrade grazing potential.

Dense infestations present a significant fire risk.

Distribution

African Feathergrass is native to South Africa. It has been used as an ornamental garden plant in Australia. It may also have been introduced as a contaminant of imported fodder.

It prefers open, well-drained soils. It is commonly found along watercourses, roadsides and wasteland where moisture is available.

In the Mount Lofty Ranges, African Feathergrass occurs near Mylor and Victor Harbor. The plant is established in the Onkaparinga Valley between Clarendon and Old Noarlunga and is present at the Happy Valley Reservoir.



Government of
South Australia



Natural Resources
Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges



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Hygiene practices

There are a number of hygiene practices that can help prevent the spread of African Feathergrass:

- avoid working in infested areas (except for control work)
- undertake control work prior to seed set
- do not remove seeds/plants from infested areas
- decontaminate stock prior to moving
- do not buy/sell contaminated fodder.

To prevent the spread of seed, thoroughly brush down equipment, people (boots etc.), machinery and vehicles when leaving an infested area.

Control methods

Small plants can be physically removed using a spade or mattock. Care is required to remove all rhizome fragments from the soil. Larger plants may need heavy machinery such as an excavator to remove the whole plant. Excavated soil should be checked for all root and rhizome fragments or piled in an area that can be monitored for regrowth.

Herbicides provide an effective follow-up treatment on excavated, slashed or burnt plants when regrowth is approximately 40 cm high.

For advice on chemical control techniques contact your nearest Natural Resources Centre. Please refer to the *Weed control handbook for declared plants in South Australia* for advice on chemical control. You can find it on Biosecurity SA's website at www.pir.sa.gov.au

What do to

If you suspect that you have African Feathergrass on your land, place a sample of the seed head in a sealed bag and take it to your nearest Natural Resources Centre or local council office for identification.

This is a free service and they will also provide you with information on current control techniques.

Declarations

The following sections of the NRM Act apply to African Feathergrass in the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges region:

- 175 (2) Cannot transport the plant, or any material or equipment containing that plant, on a public road**
- 177 (1) Cannot sell the plant**
- 177 (2) Cannot sell any produce / goods carrying the plant**
- 182 (2) Landowner must control the plant on their land**
- 185 (1) NRM authority may recover costs for control of weeds on roadsides from adjoining landowners**

More information

Please contact your local Natural Resources Centre for further information, advice and assistance in controlling African Feathergrass.

Black Hill

115 Maryvale Road, Athelstone 5076

T: 08 8336 0901

Gawler

8 Adelaide Road, Gawler South 5118

T: 08 8523 7700

Willunga

5 Aldinga Road, Willunga 5172

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