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May 2, 2005
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‘CHINESE TALLOW TREE INVASION’

For Immediate Release

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Chinese Tallow trees have invaded East Texas with a vengeance, oftentimes outcompeting native vegetation, thus creating expansive areas virtually devoid of wildlife due to the very poor ecological values associated with this exotic pest.

While working on Longleaf Pine restoration near Natural Area Preservation Association's Westernmost Longleaf Pine Preserve in San Jacinto County, Preserve Steward, George Russell made an interesting discovery that might someday lead to the virtual elimination of Chinese Tallow invaders.

Amongst thousands of Sweetgum and Loblolly Pine Trees that had formed dense thickets after roads had been cut and later abandoned on the property around twenty years ago, he discovered a lone immature Chinese Tallow. Searching for the source of the seed that produced the tree, he looked up and saw a huge Tallow with four stems nearby.

Mysteriously the "mother" tree had only produced a single surviving offspring over the course of years. Russell's theory is that native Sweetgums and Pines had out-competed the exotic intruder. Hundreds of thousands of young Sweetgums and Pines are found in the disturbed areas on the Russell properties, and very few Chinese Tallows.

Sweetgum forms a beautiful tree that produces not only the bright Fall colors with its leaves as does the Tallow but provides a source of food for myriad species of small seed eating birds in Winter such as the American Goldfinch. Sweetgums are fast growing, provide excellent shade, are long-lived and produce beautiful lumber.

Loblolly Pines, although not as ecologically valuable as Sweetgums, could provide a potential source of revenue for property owners if interspersed with Sweetgums.

Russell believes that if Sweetgum seeds are broadcast in areas subject to Chinese Tallow invasion or in areas where Tallows have been temporarily eliminated through mechanical means, then the Sweetgums would have a chance to outperform the Tallows and instead of these areas becoming virtual biological deserts, the Sweetgum forest would provide shelter and food for a significant range of our Texas native species of wildlife.

It is also hoped by Russell that the Texas Forest Service's Indian Mounds Nursery will begin an intensive program to produce millions of Sweetgum seedlings to plant in areas subject to Chinese Tallow invasion.

Another discovery that Russell had made previously concerning Chinese Tallow, was his observation over the course of nearly thirty years, of an invasion of Tallows on one of the Russell properties in Walker County. He made no effort to eradicate the Tallows in order to study the tree's life history.

At first the Tallows comprised nearly 100% of the trees on the site. Gradually, over the course of years, as native Pines began to "top" the Tallows, the Tallow population went into serious decline. Today, of the hundreds of Tallows that had invaded the sunny opening, only a few unhealthy looking trees survive in the shade of the native trees that eventually outperformed the Tallows.

Unfortunately, Chinese Tallow has also invaded rare native prairies in Texas, virtually eliminating the native grasses and forbs. Sweetgum and Pine planting on native prairies would be inappropriate and science will need to come up with another solution to that problem, according to David Bezanson, Executive Director, Natural Area Preservation Association.

Russell, who has served as Forest Practices Chair, Lone Star Sierra Club for a quarter century, has studied Sweetgums for decades and has noted that they are often hollow, thus providing dens for wildlife. They are often blessed with other cavities that provide shelter for birds, bats, frogs, insects, and other species.

Because of the numerous "Sweetgum balls" that fall from the tree and must be swept up, Texans have developed almost a hatred of the tree and millions of Sweetgums have been destroyed, thus impoverishing our State. Recently, the City of Huntsville spent tens of thousands of tax dollars to destroy several magnificent Sweetgums on the Sam Houston Homestead because of a property owner complaint.

Russell hopes that some day the Sweetgum will not only HELP conquer the invasive Chinese Tallow, but the hearts and minds of Texans as well.

George H. Russell
Waterwood, Texas

George H. Russell, an outspoken opponent of the death penalty, is a resident of Huntsville, Texas, known worldwide as "The City of Death."

He is founder of The Patriot Network, and author of its 35+ web sites located at www.patriotnetwork.org, as well as founder of The Universal Ethician Church, an interfaith ministry with a worldwide following via the church's 275+ web sites located at www.salvationnetwork.org.

Russell, 60, is an educational video producer, environmental activist, historic preservation specialist, photographer, art and antique collector, philanthropist, American patriot and ethician.

Additional biographical information may be found in *Who's Who in America*, through Internet searches, and in other publications. Images of Mr. Russell suitable for downloading for publication may be found at www.salvationnetwork.org.