

Culturally Significant Plant Plays Important Role at North Dakota Plant Materials Center

Sweetgrass (*Hierochloa odorata*) is a native grass traditionally used by Native American cultures for many purposes. The source of sweetgrass's aroma, which smells like vanilla, is coumarin. This plant compound has been used for hundreds of years as a plant extract for both fragrance and medicinal use.

Native American cultures burn braided sweetgrass twists in traditional ceremonies, using the sweet scented smoke as a purifying incense.

The species is locally subject to over-collecting and is sensitive to grazing.

A collection of northern-hardy sweetgrass, originating from a sandbar in the Missouri River near Bismarck, has been distributed throughout the three-state area for testing and tribal propagation.

Propagation beds have been established at numerous reservations with plants being increased and distributed to tribal members.

The process begins each spring at the Bismarck PMC when rhizomes of sweetgrass are harvested from a sprigging bed in April to fill requests received through each state plant materials committee.

The rhizomes are divided and put into small individual containers to grow out in the greenhouse. It is an early, cool-season plant species, and growth is rapid.

Often seedheads are formed in the center's greenhouse within three weeks of transplanting. The plants are hardened off in May in the lathhouse, and 10 plants each are readied to ship to cooperators at the end of the month.

When the young plants are placed in a garden like setting with good weed control, the plants establish quickly and rhizomes can spread rapidly. Hundreds of new plants from rhizomes the first year are possible, and thousands the second year.

Approximately 165 orders of sweetgrass

have been distributed in the last seven years. The number of rhizomes that have been produced from those plants in that time would surely be in the millions!



For time immemorial elaborate coiled baskets made from sweetgrass have been an important cultural product for many native American tribes

source: USDA

For more information go to:

Bismarck, North Dakota, Plant Materials Center,
<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/ndpmc/>

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Hurricane Damaged States to Get Funding From NRCS Program

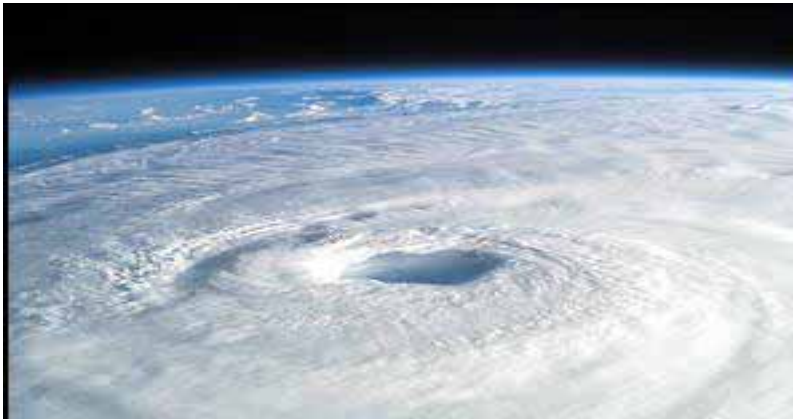
The Plant Materials Program's Coastal Resource webpage now has a link to the NRCS Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program resource page where information on funds available to help communities in three hurricane states to protect life and property from fires can be found.

These EWP program funds are now available to build firebreaks to reduce the threat of fires from downed timber and create a safer environment for residents.

The firebreaks will be funded with a portion of \$300 million in supplemental

appropriations approved by Congress in December 2005 for six hurricane-stricken states, including Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. (A firebreak is a strip of bare land or vegetation that slows down or buffers a fire.)

This conservation practice includes access roads, vegetated firebreaks, plowed or disked firebreaks and grazed firebreaks. USDA Service Centers will work very closely with state forestry departments to ensure proper procedures are being followed as they help communities and landowners carry out this conservation practice.



Hurricane are among nature's worst storms
source: NASA

private lands. NRCS will pay landowners and landusers up to 75 percent of the cost, or up to \$150 per acre, to remove dead or dying timber adjacent to important community structures such as schools and homes.

In the supplemental appropriations approved in

December 2005, Congress expanded EWP program authority to pay part of the cost for timber removal on private, non-industrial land adversely impacted by the hurricanes.

Normally, NRCS uses EWP funds to pay landowners and landusers to remove

debris from stream channels, road culverts and bridges; reshape and protect eroded banks; correct damaged drainways; repair levees and structures; and reseed damaged areas.

Communities or landowners interested in this assistance should contact their local USDA Service Center at

<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=nrcs>

Additional information about EWP is available at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/ewp>

Our Mission Statement: *Deliver plant-science technology to meet the nation's natural resources conservation needs.*

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