

## Invasive plants are becoming less of a problem with Walterboro Wildlife Sanctuary

By Rick Tobin

City of Walterboro Parks Director Carolyn Powell and her crew of six have just about gotten the plant invasion problem won.

In 1998, it was noted that invasive plant species were thriving within the Walterboro Wildlife Sanctuary (which was then the Great Swamp Sanctuary). Carolyn, who has been involved in landscaping for over 20 years, noted the problem was spreading, and it was decided that something had to be done to handle it. "The idea was to get rid of the invasive plants, because, in many areas, they were so thick that you couldn't see through the woods."

Carolyn said the city obtained a grant from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and received help with the project through the Nature Conservancy. Bids were taken to hire a company to eliminate the invasive plants. "We hired Crop Production



An invasive Chinese Privet plant. Photo submitted

Services, and the employees came through with mist blowers, and treated a 50-acre section. They did this during the winter months, when most trees and plants were dormant. The plants we targeted stayed green, and were able to absorb the liquids during the colder months."

Carolyn said the worst of the invasive plants to deal with were Chinese Privet, which blooms buds that contain seeds that are eaten by birds and excreted later at other locations to grow again, and is one of the most ecologically-destructive plants; Chinese Wisteria, which can kill out trees and compete with other plants; and kudzu, which now covers 7,000,000 acres across the southeast, covers an additional 120,000 additional acres every year, and costs \$500,000,000 in annual losses. It can take several years to get kudzu under



Carolyn Powell finds an invasive Chinese Privet plant. Photo by Rick Tobin

City Manager Jeff Lord was very involved in this project. He had the vision for this area, and was big in getting it off the ground."

It is somewhat surprising to hear just how much area the crew maintains. "We take care of the exit areas of the 53 and 57 exits of I-95, plus a mile-long stretch of I-95 approaching those exits," Carolyn said.

"Former City Manager Tuck McConnell came up with the idea of the lead-in theory. He said that the landscaped areas north and south of the Walterboro exits would attract motorists to Walterboro; and, since they have been planted, a lot of traffic is getting off at those interchanges."

Along with working within the sanctuary and interstate areas, the crew works in the city parks, the Downtown Area, the area around City Hall, the Little Library, and the sides and medians along Bells Highway. "We also mow all of South Jefferies Boulevard, from Live Oak Cemetery to the El Cheapo gas station on both sides, and we also mow along Ireland Creek."

Carolyn said, "People are constantly asking, 'How can you possibly take care of all these areas?'"

She added that she and her crew take care of what needs precedence each week, and the jobs get done. As we passed a pond near the sanctuary's

Detroitville Street exit, Carolyn said, "We used to have a gator living in that pond, and a bench swing was near the edge. The gator would swim up, and people would start feeding it. Finally, it got to the point where the gator would wait under the swing for people to come and feed it, and the gator had to go." She noted that personnel from the S.C. Department of Natural Resources relocated the reptile, adding that a low fence line was constructed, and the swing was moved away from the pond's edge.

control. "The idea is to get the invasive plants out, so the tree canopy can expand to look more like a forest," Carolyn said. She added that, after the 50 acres was treated, and the plants died, the contractor came through and used equipment to grind up the residue. "We then planted 300 to 400 swamp chestnut, water oak, and willow oak trees in that area."

Carolyn said that, now, the invasive plant problem has been almost completely solved, but that she and her crew routinely go through the sanctuary to get rid of some of the plants that still come up on occasion. Powell's crew includes Lisa Garnsey, Connie Wright, Pam Wright, Lisa Needham, Chris Jennings, and Robert Manigo. "The contractor got the invasive plants to a manageable level, and then we took over. Little by little, we're getting them out of here. Former