



# TROPICAL SAVANNAS CRC

Cooperative Research Centre for the Sustainable Development of Tropical Savannas

## Could Fire Put the Rubbervine Invader to Rout?



Photo: Kate O'Donnell

Tall towers of rubbervine shroud trees alongside the Burdekin River in north Queensland. The plant can eventually smother native vegetation along waterways, preventing access to both stock and native animals.

**A 1989 survey estimated that some 600,000 hectares in Queensland were already affected by rubbervine, with the potential for the weed to infest 60 million hectares of northern Australia, which would be 20 per cent of the continent.**

Recent studies have shown that fire can be a cheap and effective way to control large-scale infestations of rubbervine. For example, experimental fires conducted by the Queensland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) over 16-kilometre study sites at Wrotham Park in north Queensland killed almost all rubbervine over a two-year period. However, research is needed to investigate the how effective fire is for controlling rubbervine in its primary habitat: along riverbanks, that is, riparian areas.

Tropical Savannas CRC, CSIRO Tropical Agriculture and DNR have begun a major study to consider this issue, and gather hard data on the effects of rubbervine on the ecosystems it invades.

An aggressive climbing woody shrub, the plant can reach a height of five metres in a year, while the branches of an established plant can grow five metres in a month.

Rubbervine favours watercourses where it forms impenetrable thickets, preventing animals from reaching the water. It can completely smother native plant communities and though unpalatable, is highly toxic to stock.

In Queensland, the rivers of the Gulf Country, Cape York Peninsula and Dalrymple Shire already have heavy infestations of rubbervine. "It can spread and grow in the immediate riparian zone as well as on areas such as floodplains and depressions," said the study's leader, Dr Tony Grice, at CSIRO TAG in Townsville.

### MISSION:

*To achieve sustainable use and conservation of Australia's tropical savannas through excellence in collaborative research, communication and education*

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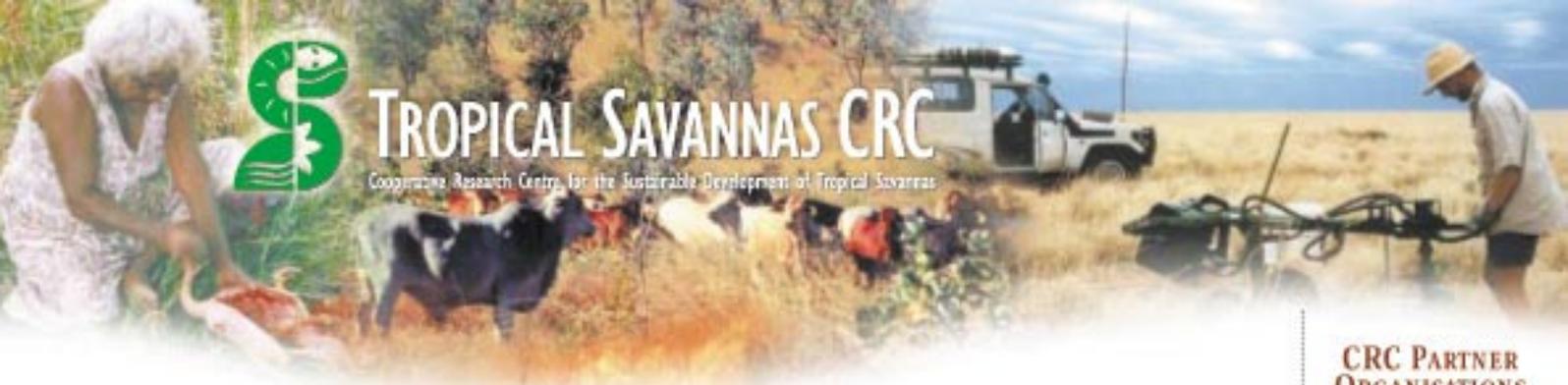
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Northern Territory Department of Lands, Planning and Environment



Researcher Tony Grice explains problems posed by rubbervine (seen here between the two men) at a research site south of Charter Towers.

the tributaries of the Burdekin River, south of Charters Towers. A further site may also be established in Cape York Peninsula.

This project aims to develop recommendations regarding the use of fire for the large-scale management of rubbervine in a variety of vegetation types and climatic zones. It will do this by documenting the short- to medium-term responses of riparian rubbervine to fire as well as examining how these fires affect native plant species.

The project's results will contribute to the National Rubbervine Strategy, which is part of the National Weed Strategy.



Rubbervine burns at one of the test sites

“The key question we are looking at is how effective is fire against rubbervine, and what impact fire will have on non-target plants and animals that live near rivers.

“With fire being recommended as one of the tools to use against rubber vine we need to consider what the side effects of using fires in these areas would be,” he explains.

The project is currently setting up sites on

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**TS-CRC Research Website**  
*Fire in the management of rubbervine-infested riparian communities*  
<http://savanna.ntu.edu.au/research/projects/firubb.html>  
*Landscape Restoration*  
[savanna.ntu.edu.au/research/projects/restore.html](http://savanna.ntu.edu.au/research/projects/restore.html)  
*Riparian Habitats*  
<http://savanna.ntu.edu.au/research/projects/riparian.html>  
*Fire and savanna landscapes*  
<http://savanna.ntu.edu.au/research/>

[projects/firsav.html](http://projects/firsav.html)  
*TS-CRC Savanna Information*  
*Weeds in northern Australia*  
<http://savanna.ntu.edu.au/information/information.html>  
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**General Websites**  
*National Weeds Strategy*  
[www.weeds.org.au/nwsec.htm](http://www.weeds.org.au/nwsec.htm)  
*Weeds Australia*  
[www.weeds.org.au/](http://www.weeds.org.au/)  
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Tropical Beef Centre

*Woody Weeds of Central Queensland*  
[leaky.rock.tap.csiro.au/facts/woody.html](http://leaky.rock.tap.csiro.au/facts/woody.html)  
*Old Department of Natural Resources Factsheets*  
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*Animal and weed pests on Cape York*  
[www.environment.gov.au/states/cyp\\_on\\_l/reports/lup/weed\\_ref.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/states/cyp_on_l/reports/lup/weed_ref.html)  
[www.environment.gov.au/states/cyp\\_on\\_l/reports/lup/weed\\_ref.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/states/cyp_on_l/reports/lup/weed_ref.html)  
**TS-CRC Newsletter *Savanna Links*:**  
Issue 8 Dec 98–Jan 99  
*Rubbervine trials reap killer results*  
*Excellent wet signals time to fire up exotic weeds*

