Heat offers kudzu solution

By Peter Kent

Kudzu has become a well-established invasive weed in the southeastern United States, occupying more than one million forestland acres. Plant scientists have been researching alternatives to herbicides, which can wash into streams, affect sensitive vegetation and be costly to apply to large areas.

One solution is to use heat to kill the kudzu root crowns that allow the plant to spread. Research in the Clemson Experimental Forest found that covering the plants with heavy-duty polyethylene sheeting for four weeks in two successive years is an effective control for environmentally sensitive areas and urban locales where herbicides would be inappropriate.

The work was begun by Larry Nelson, associate professor of forestry and natural resources, and completed by master's student Casey Newton. Newton graduated from Clemson in August 2007 and joined an Atlanta-based firm that manages environmental quality on military bases. About the same time as his graduation, the kudzu research results were published.

For more information: www.kokudzu.com/page19.html.

Photo by Peter Kent