Scientific name: *Sorghum halepense*  
USDA Plants Code: SOHA

Common names: Johnson Grass, Johnsongrass

Native distribution: Mediterranean

Date assessed: 7-23-2013

Assessors: Zach Deitch, Ellen Jacquart

Reviewers: John Miller

Date Approved: 8-10-2013

### Indiana Invasiveness Rank:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invasiveness Ranking Summary</th>
<th>Total (Total Answered*)</th>
<th>Total Possible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Ecological impact</td>
<td>40 (40)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Biological characteristic and dispersal ability</td>
<td>25 (25)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Ecological amplitude and distribution</td>
<td>25 (25)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Difficulty of control</td>
<td>10 (10)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outcome score  

Relative maximum score $^\dagger$  

Indiana Invasiveness Rank $^\S$  

* For questions answered “unknown” do not include point value in “Total Answered Points Possible.” If “Total Answered Points Possible” is less than 70.00 points, then the overall invasive rank should be listed as “Unknown.”

$^\dagger$ Calculated as 100(a/b) to two decimal places.

$^\S$ Very High >80.00; High 70.00–80.00; Moderate 50.00–69.99; Low 40.00–49.99; Insignificant <40.00

### A. DISTRIBUTION (KNOWN/POTENTIAL):

- **A1** Has this species been documented to persist without cultivation in IN? (reliable source; voucher not required)
  - ☒ Yes – continue to A2.2
  - ☐ No – continue to A2.1

- **A2** What is the likelihood that this species will occur and persist outside of cultivation given the climate in Indiana? (obtain from occurrence data in other states with similar climates)
  - ☒ Likely – continue to A3
  - ☐ Not likely – stop here. There is no need to assess the species

Documentation:

A3 Describe the potential or known suitable habitats within Indiana (underlined). Natural habitats include all habitats not under active human management. Managed habitats are indicated with an asterisk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aquatic Habitats</th>
<th>Wetland Habitats</th>
<th>Upland Habitats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rivers/streams</td>
<td>Marshes</td>
<td>Forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural lakes and ponds</td>
<td>Fens</td>
<td>Savannas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reservoirs/impoundments*</td>
<td>Bogs</td>
<td>Barrens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shrub swamps</td>
<td>Prairies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forested wetlands/riparian</td>
<td>Cultivated*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beaches/dunes</td>
<td>Old Fields*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ditches*</td>
<td>Roadsides*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other potential or known suitable habitats within Indiana: open forests, old fields, and stream banks.

Documentation: *Orchards, vineyards, ditches, disturbed sites, roadsides, fields, and agronomic and vegetable crop fields. It also invades undisturbed tallgrass and coastal prairies, savannas, and riparian zones. In Indiana it is found primarily in old fields, roadsides, and the edges of cultivated fields, but can be found in barrens and prairies.*

Sources of information:
Virginia Cooperative Extension, 2013.
Smith, 2008.
Jacquart, Personal Observation.

B. INVASIVENESS RANKING
Questions apply to areas similar in climate and habitats to Indiana unless specified otherwise.

1. ECOLOGICAL IMPACT

1.1. Impact on Natural Ecosystem Processes and System-Wide Parameters (e.g. fire regime, geomorphological changes (erosion, sedimentation rates), hydrologic regime, nutrient and mineral dynamics, light availability, salinity, pH)

A. No perceivable impact on ecosystem processes based on research studies, or the absence of impact information if a species is widespread (>10 occurrences in minimally managed areas), has been well-studied (>10 reports/publications), and has been present in the northeast for >100 years. 0

B. Influences ecosystem processes to a minor degree (e.g., has a perceivable but mild influence on soil nutrient availability) 3

C. Significant alteration of ecosystem processes (e.g., increases sedimentation rates along streams or coastlines, reduces open water that are important to waterfowl) 7

D. Major, possibly irreversible, alteration or disruption of ecosystem processes (e.g., the species alters geomorphology and/or hydrology, affects fire frequency, alters soil pH, or fixes substantial levels of nitrogen in the soil making soil unlikely to support certain native plants or more likely to favor non-native species) 10

U. Unknown

Score 3

Documentation:
Identify ecosystem processes impacted (or if applicable, justify choosing answer A in the absence of impact information)
**1.2. Impact on Natural Community Structure**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact Description</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No perceived impact; establishes in an existing layer without influencing its structure</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences structure in one layer (e.g., changes the density of one layer)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant impact in at least one layer (e.g., creation of a new layer or elimination of an existing layer)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major alteration of structure (e.g., covers canopy, eradicating most or all layers below)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Documentation:**
- Forms dense spreading patches that will completely smother other grasses.
- The plant directly shades other plants.

Sources of information:
- Warwick & Black, 1983.

**1.3. Impact on Natural Community Composition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact Description</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No perceived impact; causes no apparent change in native populations</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences community composition (e.g., reduces the number of individuals in one or more native species in the community)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significantly alters community composition (e.g., produces a significant reduction in the population size of one or more native species in the community)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causes major alteration in community composition (e.g., results in the extirpation of one or several native species, reducing biodiversity or change the community composition towards species exotic to the natural community)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Documentation:**
- It rapidly produces colonies and is very competitive with existing vegetation. Displaces desirable vegetation and restricts tree seedling establishment.
- Decreases nutrient and moisture availability to other plants.

Sources of information:
- Smith, 2008.

**1.4. Impact on other species or species groups (cumulative impact of this species on the animals, fungi, microbes, and other organisms in the community it invades. Examples include reduction in nesting/foraging sites; reduction in habitat**
connectivity; injurious components such as spines, thorns, burrs, toxins; suppresses
soil/sediment microflora; interferes with native pollinators and/or pollination of a
native species; hybridizes with a native species; hosts a non-native disease which
impacts a native species)

A. Negligible perceived impact 0
B. Minor impact 3
C. Moderate impact 7
D. Severe impact on other species or species groups 10
U. Unknown

Documentation:
Identify type of impact or alteration:
Under certain conditions, the leaves of Johnsongrass can produce toxic amounts of
hydrocyanic acid, which can poison livestock and possibly other wildlife when ingested.

Inhibits the growth of other plants via the production of allelopathic chemicals.

Johnson grass also impacts agricultural lands as an alternate host for many of crop-
damaging insects, nematodes, fungi, and viruses.

Sources of information:
Warwick & Black, 1983.

Total Possible 40
Section One Total 27

2. BIOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS AND DISPERSAL ABILITY

2.1. Mode and rate of reproduction
A. No reproduction by seeds or vegetative propagules (i.e. plant sterile with no sexual or
asexual reproduction). 0
B. Limited reproduction (fewer than 10 viable seeds per plant AND no vegetative
reproduction; if viability is not known, then maximum seed production is less than 100
seeds per plant and no vegetative reproduction) 1
C. Moderate reproduction (fewer than 100 viable seeds per plant - if viability is not known,
then maximum seed production is less than 1000 seeds per plant - OR limited successful
vegetative spread documented) 2
D. Abundant reproduction with vegetative asexual spread documented as one of the plants
prime reproductive means OR more than 100 viable seeds per plant (if viability is not
known, then maximum seed production reported to be greater than 1000 seeds per plant.)
U. Unknown

Documentation:
Describe key reproductive characteristics (including seeds per plant):
28,000 mean production of seeds per plant.

A perennial from rhizomes. Flowers bloom from May through October. Generally self-
pollinated but can be cross-fertilized. Reproduces by seed and underground stems. The
rhizomes regenerate easily from small pieces and are capable of growing or remaining
dormant in a wide range of environmental conditions. Plants tolerate pH of 5-7.5.

Sources of information:
Smith, 2008.
Warwick & Black, 1983.

2.2. Innate potential for long-distance dispersal (e.g. bird dispersal, sticks to animal hair, buoyant fruits, pappus for wind-dispersal)

A. Does not occur (no long-distance dispersal mechanisms) 0
B. Infrequent or inefficient long-distance dispersal (occurs occasionally despite lack of adaptations) 1
C. Moderate opportunities for long-distance dispersal (adaptations exist for long-distance dispersal, but studies report that 95% of seeds land within 100 meters of the parent plant) 2
D. Numerous opportunities for long-distance dispersal (adaptations exist for long-distance dispersal and evidence that many seeds disperse greater than 100 meters from the parent plant) 4
U. Unknown

Score 4

Documentation:
Identify dispersal mechanisms:
Potential for far ranging dispersal by water, wind, birds, livestock, commercial seed contamination, and contaminated machinery, grain or hay.

Sources of information:
Smith, 2008.
Warwick & Black, 1983.

2.3. Potential to be spread by human activities (both directly and indirectly – possible mechanisms include: commercial sales, use as forage/revegetation, spread along highways, transport on boats, contaminated compost, land and vegetation management equipment such as mowers and excavators, etc.)

A. Does not occur 0
B. Low (human dispersal to new areas occurs almost exclusively by direct means and is infrequent or inefficient) 1
C. Moderate (human dispersal to new areas occurs by direct and indirect means to a moderate extent) 2
D. High (opportunities for human dispersal to new areas by direct and indirect means are numerous, frequent, and successful) 3
U. Unknown

Score 3

Documentation:
Identify dispersal mechanisms:
Intentional: Originally introduced as a forage crop.
Unintentional: water, wind, birds, livestock, commercial seed contamination, and contaminated machinery, grain or hay.

Sources of information:
Virginia Cooperative Extension, 2013.
Smith, 2008.
Warwick & Black, 1983.
2.4. Characteristics that increase competitive advantage, such as shade tolerance, ability to grow on infertile soils, perennial habit, fast growth, nitrogen fixation, allelopathy, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics that increase competitive advantage</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Possesses no characteristics that increase competitive advantage</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Possesses one characteristic that increases competitive advantage</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Possesses two or more characteristics that increase competitive advantage</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U. Unknown</td>
<td>Score</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Documentation:**

*Rate of Spread:*

*HIGH (1-3 yrs)*

*Notes:*

Evidence of competitive ability:

*Johnsongrass is capable of rapidly colonizing a variety of different environments due to prolific seed production, extensive rhizome system, ability of rhizome fragments to re-sprout, and adaptation to a wide range of habitats. Allelopathic effects have been reported for Johnsongrass.*

Sources of information:

- Virginia Cooperative Extension, 2013.
- Smith, 2008.
- Warwick & Black, 1983.

2.5. Growth vigor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Growth vigor</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Does not form thickets or have a climbing or smothering growth habit</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Has climbing or smothering growth habit, forms a dense layer above shorter vegetation, forms dense thickets, or forms a dense floating mat in aquatic systems where it smothers other vegetation or organisms</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U. Unknown</td>
<td>Score</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Documentation:**

*Describe growth form: It can form tall, dense stands that spread and smother other grasses.*

Sources of information:

- Smith, 2008.
- Warwick & Black, 1983.

2.6. Germination/Regeneration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Germination/Regeneration</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Requires open soil or water and disturbance for seed germination, or regeneration from vegetative propagules.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Can germinate/regenerate in vegetated areas but in a narrow range or in special conditions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Can germinate/regenerate in existing vegetation in a wide range of conditions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U. Unknown (No studies have been completed)</td>
<td>Score</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Documentation:**

*Describe germination requirements: Johnsongrass, adapted to a wide range of soil types, grows best on porous, fertile lowlands and least well on poorly drained clay soils. Plants tolerate a pH of 5-7.5.*

*Light improves germination rate with warm temperatures (>93 °F (34 °C)) and inhibits germination with cold temperatures (<72 °F (22 °C). Litter cover or shallow burial may aid germination in the field.*
### 2.7. Other species in the genus invasive in Indiana or elsewhere

| A. No | 0 |
| B. Yes | 3 |
| U. Unknown | Score | 0 |

**Documentation:**

No other species in the genus invasive in Indiana.

**Species:**

| Total Possible | 25 |
| Section Two Total | 22 |

### 3. ECOLOGICAL AMPLITUDE AND DISTRIBUTION

#### 3.1. Density of stands in natural areas in the northeastern USA and eastern Canada

(use same definition as Gleason & Cronquist which is: “The part of the United States covered extends from the Atlantic Ocean west to the western boundaries of Minnesota, Iowa, northern Missouri, and southern Illinois, south to the southern boundaries of Virginia, Kentucky, and Illinois, and south to the Missouri River in Missouri. In Canada the area covered includes Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and parts of Quebec and Ontario lying south of the 47th parallel of latitude”)

| A. No large stands (no areas greater than 1/4 acre or 1000 square meters) | 0 |
| B. Large dense stands present in areas with numerous invasive species already present or disturbed landscapes | 2 |
| C. Large dense stands present in areas with few other invasive species present (i.e. ability to invade relatively pristine natural areas) | 4 |
| U. Unknown | Score | 2 |

**Documentation:**

Identify reason for selection, or evidence of weedy history:

*It can form large, tall, dense stands that can spread. In Indiana, generally found in disturbed habitats (Jacquart, personal observation).*

**Sources of information:**

Smith, 2008.
Warwick & Black, 1983.

#### 3.2. Number of habitats the species may invade

| A. Not known to invade any natural habitats given at A2.2 | 0 |
| B. Known to occur in two or more of the habitats given at A2.2, with at least one a natural habitat | 1 |
| C. Known to occur in three or more of the habitats given at A2.2, with at least two a natural habitat | 2 |
D. Known to occur in four or more of the habitats given at A2.2, with at least three a natural habitat.  
E. Known to occur in more than four of the habitats given at A2.2, with at least four a natural habitat.  
U. Unknown

Score 2

Documentation:  
Identify type of habitats where it occurs and degree/type of impacts:  
*Six habitats identified with two being natural in A3.*

Sources of information:  
See A3.

3.3. Role of disturbance in establishment  
A. Requires anthropogenic disturbances to establish.  
B. May occasionally establish in undisturbed areas but can readily establish in areas with natural or anthropogenic disturbances.  
C. Can establish independent of any known natural or anthropogenic disturbances.  
U. Unknown

Score 2

Documentation:  
Identify type of disturbance:  
*Generally inhabits agricultural sites, open lands, and other disturbed habitat.*

Sources of information:  

3.4. Climate in native range  
A. Native range does not include climates similar to Indiana  
B. Native range possibly includes climates similar to at least part of Indiana  
C. Native range includes climates similar to those in Indiana  
U. Unknown

Score 3

Documentation:  
Describe what part of the native range is similar in climate to Indiana:  
*Found in essentially all temperate regions of the world.*

Sources of information:  
Smith, 2008.  
USDA, NRCS. 2007.

3.5. Current introduced distribution in the northeastern USA and eastern Canada (see question 3.1 for definition of geographic scope)  
A. Not known from the northeastern US and adjacent Canada  
B. Present as a non-native in one northeastern USA state and/or eastern Canadian province.  
C. Present as a non-native in 2 or 3 northeastern USA states and/or eastern Canadian provinces.  
D. Present as a non-native in 4–8 northeastern USA states and/or eastern Canadian provinces, and/or categorized as a problem weed (e.g., “Noxious” or “Invasive”) in 1 northeastern state or eastern Canadian province.  
E. Present as a non-native in >8 northeastern USA states and/or eastern Canadian provinces.

Score 4
and/or categorized as a problem weed (e.g., “Noxious” or “Invasive”) in 2 northeastern states or eastern Canadian provinces.

U. Unknown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documentation:</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify states and provinces invaded:</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>It occurs in nearly every state of the contiguous United States and in Southern Canada.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of information:</td>
<td>USDA, NRCS. 2007.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6. Current introduced distribution of the species in natural areas in Indiana

| A. Present in no Indiana counties | 0 |
| B. Present in 1-10 Indiana counties | 1 |
| C. Present in 11-20 Indiana counties | 2 |
| D. Present in 21-50 Indiana counties | 3 |
| E. Present in more than 50 Indiana counties or on Federal noxious weed list | 4 |
| U. Unknown | 4 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documentation:</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe distribution:</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Documented in 76 counties of Indiana.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of information:</td>
<td>See A1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Possible 25
Section Three Total 17

4. DIFFICULTY OF CONTROL

4.1. Seed banks

| A. Seeds (or vegetative propagules) remain viable in soil for less than 1 year, or does not make viable seeds or persistent propagules. | 0 |
| B. Seeds (or vegetative propagules) remain viable in soil for at least 1 to 10 years | 2 |
| C. Seeds (or vegetative propagules) remain viable in soil for more than 10 years | 3 |
| U. Unknown | 2 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documentation:</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seed can remain viable in the soil for up to seven years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of information:</td>
<td>Warwick &amp; Black, 1983.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2. Vegetative regeneration

| A. No regrowth following removal of aboveground growth | 0 |
| B. Regrowth from ground-level meristems | 1 |
| C. Regrowth from extensive underground system | 2 |
| D. Any plant part is a viable propagule | 3 |
U. Unknown

**Documentation:**
Describe vegetative response:
*Has a fibrous root system and thick rhizomes. Reproduces by seed and underground stems.*

Sources of information:
Virginia Cooperative Extension, 2013.

**Score**: 2

---

4.3. Level of effort required

A. Management is not required: e.g., species does not persist without repeated anthropogenic disturbance.  

B. Management is relatively easy and inexpensive: e.g. 10 or fewer person-hours of manual effort (pulling, cutting and/or digging) can eradicate a 1 acre infestation in 1 year (infestation averages 50% cover or 1 plant/100 ft²).  

C. Management requires a major short-term investment: e.g. 100 or fewer person-hours/year of manual effort, or up to 10 person-hours/year using mechanical equipment (chain saws, mowers, etc.) for 2-5 years to suppress a 1 acre infestation. Eradication is difficult, but possible (infestation as above).  

D. Management requires a major investment: e.g. more than 100 person-hours/year of manual effort, or more than 10 person hours/year using mechanical equipment, or the use of herbicide, grazing animals, fire, etc. for more than 5 years to suppress a 1 acre infestation. Eradication may be impossible (infestation as above).

---

**Documentation:**
Identify types of control methods and time-term required:
*Based upon its nearly worldwide distribution and adverse effect on the global economy, it is described as 1 of the world's worst weeds.*

**Mechanical:** Repeated close mowing or grazing kills seedlings and reduces regrowth and seed production. Repeated tillage throughout a growing season will kill most of the Johnson grass but if not done for long enough may encourage growth.

**Chemical:** The application of a foliar solution of 2 percent glyphosate in the early summer (just prior to seed maturity) has resulted in a high rate of mortality. This herbicide treatment may need to be repeated for several years to ensure good control. The most successful chemical control can be achieved with a foliar solution of 1 ounce sulfosulfuron/100 gallons water plus a 0.5 percent non-ionic surfactant. This solution will treat an area approximately the size of an acre.

Repeated tillage, proper herbicides, and crop rotation will give the best Johnson grass control.

Sources of information:
Smith, 2008.
Warwick & Black, 1983.

**Score**: 4

---

Total Possible: 10

Section Four Total: 8

Total for 4 sections Possible: 100
References for species assessment:


Citation: This IN ranking form may be cited as: Jacquart, E.M. 2011. Invasiveness ranking system for non-native plants of Indiana. Unpublished. Invasive Plant Advisory Committee (IPAC) to the Indiana Invasive Species Council, Indianapolis, IN.

Acknowledgments: The IN ranking form is an adaptation for Indiana use of the form created for New York by Jordan et al. (2009), cited below. Documentation for species assessed for New York are used for Indiana where they are applicable. The Invasive Plant Advisory Committee was created by the Indiana Invasive Species Council in October 2010, and is made up of the original members of the Indiana Invasive Plant Assessment Working Group (IPSAWG). Original members of IPSAWG included representatives of the The Nature Conservancy; Indiana Native Plant and Wildflower Society; Indiana Nursery and Landscape Association; Indiana Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects; Indiana Forage Council; Indiana Wildlife Federation; Indiana State Beekeepers Association; Indiana Beekeeper’s Association; Department of Natural Resources; Hoosier National Forest; Indiana Academy of Science; Natural Resources Conservation Service; Indiana Department of Environmental Management; Indiana Department of Transportation; Purdue Cooperative Extension Service; Seed Administrator, Office of the Indiana State Chemist.

References for the Indiana ranking form:

References for the New York ranking form:


