

INVASIVE SPECIES

CASUARINA

CASUARINA EQUISETIFOLIA

HISTORY

The Casuarina was introduced to Southern Florida in the late 1800s where it was planted near homesteads and orchards for shade or windbreak. In the 1930's it was planted on reclaimed land in swamp areas as it was believed to aid in drying up swamps, which it didn't. Experts estimate that Casuarina was planted in The Bahamas around the same time and just like Florida, the plant has exploded to an uncontrollable population.



DESCRIPTION

This tall tree can grow to about 20 meters (65 feet) tall in the Americas and even taller in Australia. The trunk can get about a meter (3.3 feet) in diameter. The branches are usually long and slender and give the plant a drooping appearance. The bark is a brown-grey and heavily furrowed, often peeling.

Casuarina is neither a pine nor a type of Cedar (*Juniperus* sp.). It is a flowering plant that appears to have very fine leaves similar to that of a pine or cedar family. Closer inspection of the "leaves" proves that they are not actually leaves at all but rather tiny branches. The actual leaves are minute colourless scales. This plant also appears to produce "cones" which house the seeds.



COMMON NAMES

Australian Pine, Cedar, Whistling Pine

HABITAT & DISTRIBUTION

Casuarinas are well adapted to grow in any habitat in The Bahamas. They prefer sandy soils and are salt-tolerant, therefore they are most common along the shoreline. The seedlings grow very quickly and so areas that are recently cleared or "disturbed" can rapidly be covered in these plants.

A native of Australia, Southern Asia, and the Pacific but it is now found in all tropical areas of the world. It is found on virtually all islands throughout The Bahamas.

CONSERVATION CONCERNS

This sturdy plant is salt and drought tolerant. It is also fast-growing and reproduces quickly, therefore enabling it to replace the slow-growing Bahamian native plants. The loss of Bahamian native plants has led to decreased biodiversity in The Bahamas. Additionally, the Casuarina covers the surrounding soil with its "needles" which prevents further growth of other plants. All these properties make the Casuarina an aggressive invader that is extremely hard to remove. It has also caused the damage of sand dunes throughout the country as its root system does not hold onto the sand as well as the native flora. Therefore, falling over easily during storms or simply allowing the sand to wash away directly from underneath the plant.



REPRODUCTION

These trees produce separate male flowers and female flowers at the same time, on the same plant. The tiny male flowers are produced at the twig tips and look like a "pine needle" that is a little fuzzy at its end. The tiny brown-red female flowers grow in heads attached to the branchlets and are followed by the production of cones that contain 70-90 winged seeds. An adult tree can produce hundreds of these cones a year.



INTERESTING FACTS

- There are over 50 different species of Casuarina in Australia. The Bahamas has two of them, the other being *C. glauca*.
- Casuarina wood is very dense and sinks even in seawater.
- The Casuarina wood makes very good firewood because it burns very slowly.

