

# Athel pine

## *Tamarix aphylla*

HABIT	STEMS & BRANCHES	LEAVES	FLOWERS	FRUIT & SEED
				
A large, spreading tree up to 18m tall. Looks similar to a conifer or pine tree because of its leaves.	Bark is rough and dark brown in colour. Stems are grey-brown. Leaves and branches are pendulous and hang downwards. The branches and leaves have salt secreting glands.	Foliage has the appearance of pine-needles. The tiny leaves attached to the needles are between 1 - 2mm long.	Flowers are tiny white or pink and are arranged spirally in dense clusters.  The first flowers appear when the plant is around three years old and every summer thereafter.	Fruit are tiny bell-shaped capsules around 3mm long.  These capsules contain cylindrical seeds that are covered with tufts of fine hairs.

Athel pine is a declared weed in accordance with the *Weeds Management Act* and is a Weed of National Significance in Australia. Management obligations for affected land managers vary depending on the class of management zone. In the Class A, Zone land managers are required to eradicate athel pine. In the Class B, Zone land managers must control the growth and spread of athel pine.

### The problem

Athel pine is a drought resistant tree which uses large amounts of available water. Athel pine is known to be responsible for lowering of water tables, thus draining waterholes and depriving native trees and animals of water. Athel pine can excrete salt onto the soil surface, raising the salinity which restricts the growth of native plants. Athel pine displaces Eucalypts and other native vegetation, resulting in dominance of the ground vegetation by relatively few species of native or salt tolerant plants, and a subsequent reduction in the number of birds and reptiles. It can change river flow patterns and cause overland flooding and bank erosion. It can have a negative effect on the cattle industry as it is harder and more expensive to muster in athel pine infestations. Accelerated rusting can occur to roofs, gutters, fences, trailers, water mains, buildings and foundations overhung by athel pine trees.

### Habitat and distribution

Athel pine is a native to northern Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, Iran and India. Introduced to Australia in the 1930s it was first planted at Whyalla and Broken Hill and has since been extensively planted in most states. Well suited to arid and semi arid rangelands, it is tolerant of saline and alkaline soils, but tends to flourish in and around rivers.

In the Northern Territory athel pine is mainly found in the central region, where it has invaded over 600 km of the Finke River. It was extensively planted in Aboriginal communities and at homesteads, bores and roadhouses as far north as the Barkly region.

## **Weed Management Plan for Athel Pine (*Tamarix aphylla*)**

Athel pine is now subject to a statutory weed management plan. This plan describes the management actions for athel pine management in the Northern Territory by all land owners and occupiers in both the class A (to be eradicated) and class B (growth and spread to be controlled) management zones. It is an offence not to comply with a weed management plan under the *Weeds Management Act*. Fines or prosecution may occur for non-compliance.

### **Preventing athel pine spread**

Athel pine can produce up to 500,000 seeds per tree annually. Seeds can travel long distances in the wind or floating on water, however they remain viable for only a few weeks after falling from the parent plant. Growth can also occur from pieces of stem and root, spread in floods and through contaminated earthmoving machinery.

Spread prevention is the most successful and cost effective way of managing weeds. By implementing the following recommendations potential seed spread can be significantly reduced: map infestations before commencing control to enable the development of a coordinated management strategy raise community awareness to aid in early detection and control of the species control minor and upstream infestations, isolated trees or seedlings first follow strict hygiene regimes to prevent spread into clean areas prioritise control along waterways to reduce spread.

### **Controlling athel pine**

#### **Chemical control**

At the time of writing there are no herbicides registered for use on athel pine. Permits can be obtained from the Australian Pest and Veterinary Medicines Authority for use of specific herbicides on particular species by specific persons.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources holds a current permit for chemical use on athel pine. The permit covers all Northern Territory persons in the use of the specified chemicals. Please contact the Weed Management Branch for further information.

#### **Non-chemical control**

Seedlings can be removed by hand. Large trees can be removed by ripping and bulldozing. The root system must be removed. Replanting suitable shade trees where existing athel pine trees have been removed may be important.

#### **Follow-up**

It is vital that follow up monitoring and treatment is carried out to control seedling recruitment and regrowth after a site has been treated. If left uncontrolled, seedlings and regrowth may develop into a bigger problem than the initial infestation.

#### **Disclaimer**

In the Northern Territory, a registered product must only be used in situations consistent to those appearing on the label, unless authorised under a permit.

Users of agricultural (or veterinary) chemical products must always read the label and any permit, before using the product and strictly comply with the directions on the label and any conditions of any permit. Users are not absolved from compliance with the directions on the label or conditions of the permit by reason of any statement made in or omission from this publication.

#### **Further information**

Weed Management Officers from the Weed Management Branch can provide advice on all aspects of weed management including control techniques, biological control, legislative responsibilities, policy advice, monitoring and reporting and regional planning.

For further information on weed management planning, integrated control, herbicide application techniques and monitoring please refer to the [NT Weed Management Handbook](#). The current Athel Pine Weed Management Plan can be found at [www.nt.gov.au/environment/weeds/weed-management-planning](http://www.nt.gov.au/environment/weeds/weed-management-planning).