



Chemical Maintenance, Inc., of Shreveport sprayed Daconate. The blackened seed heads and fallen stems indicate weed kill.

Report from Chemical Maintenance, Inc.

Weeds Are Losing The Ditchbanks In Louisiana War

Before the attack, waist-high Johnsongrass lined both sides of Bayou Pierre.

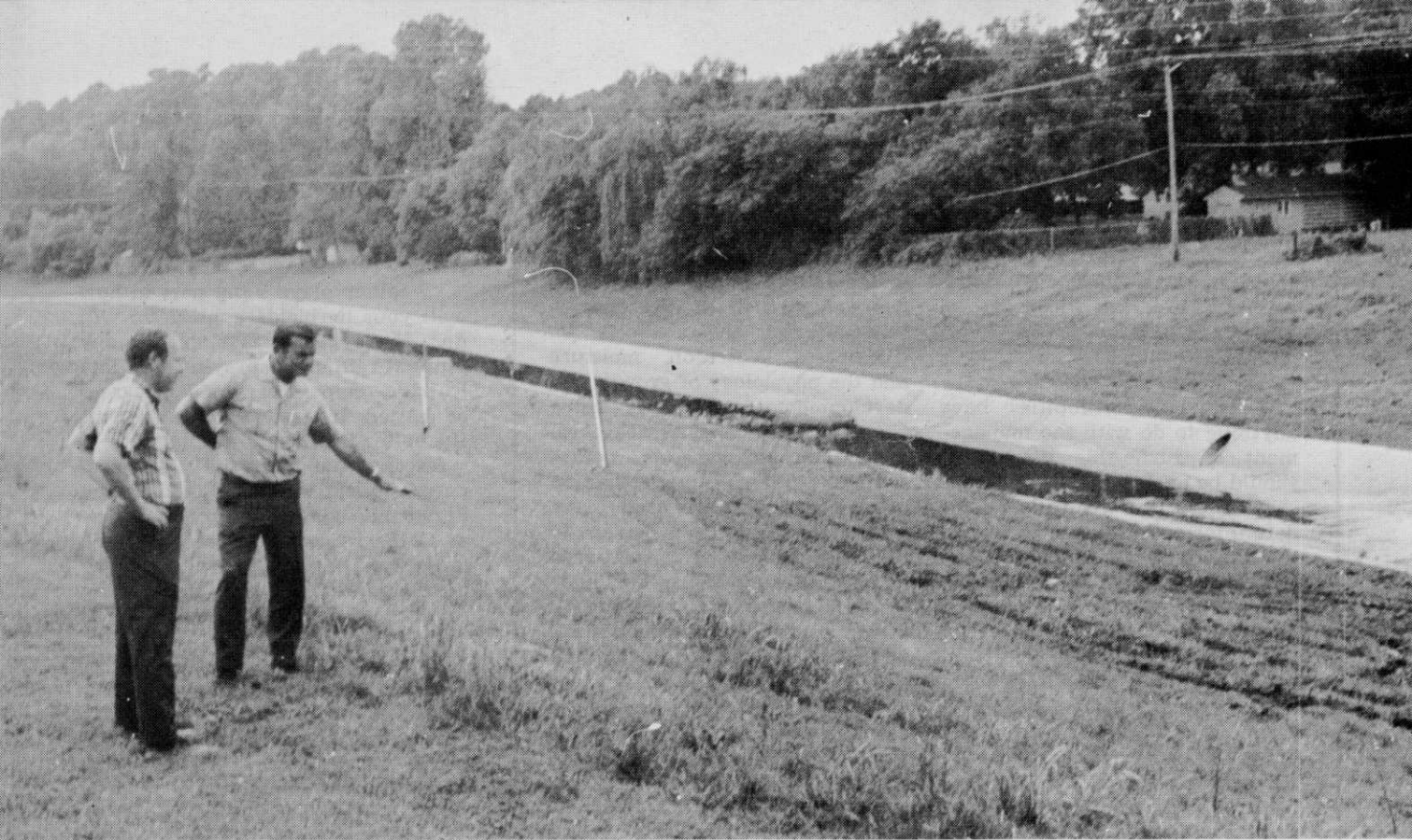


IT MAY NOT BE as bad as the Amazon basin jungle, but in steamy Louisiana it wouldn't take long for weeds and undergrowth to take over just as soon as man's bulldozer leaves. For those whose job is building ditches, levees, industrial plants, rights-of-way, etc., that fact is a headache that just won't quit.

For Jim McCoy and Max Edwards, operators of Chemical Maintenance, Inc., Shreveport, the fact that weeds grow like weeds in Louisiana is money in the bank. Their firm is the Excedrin for the builder's headache.

Chemical Maintenance, Inc., is basically in the business of industrial and right-of-way vegetation control. McCoy has been in the business for five years and Edwards for nine. Their work includes cleaning up weeds and underbrush around industrial plants, in ditches, along pipelines, highways, bayous, and just about anywhere that man wants to get rid of unwanted vegetation. In an area where just about every parish, or county, has miles and miles of drainage ditches and bayous to keep cropland and even cities above water level, this job can be considerable.

"We do go around to industrial plants, inquire as to their weed control problems, try to point out needs and recommend programs, but the majority of our work—probably 65%—is in ditch and riverbank under-



Bermudagrass is taking over. Jim McCoy, right, shows the results to Bill Mosley, Diamond-Shamrock Chemical Co.

growth removal," McCoy explains. "We work within a 300-mile radius of Shreveport, and this includes 300 miles of drainage ditches in Caddo Parish, more than 300 in Bossier Parish and 500 miles of ditches in Tennesaw Parish."

Most of CMI's work is on a year-to-year contract basis, McCoy says, although they prefer to work out long-term contracts where they can do a regular removal job. "Actually," he explains, "we don't do ditches every year anyway; most are cleaned up every two to four years. Where we have long-term contracts with such groups as Parish Levee Boards, we may handle half of their levees and ditchbanks each year, keeping growth minimal and costs down."

Those people responsible for the maintenance of the levees and drainage ditches recognize weed and underbrush control as a necessary expense. If cultivated land is to be kept as free of weeds as possible, the ditchbanks and levees also have to be prevented from becoming weed-seed breeding grounds. Also, says McCoy, weeds and vines don't hold soil on a steep ditchbank like grass does, and it is necessary to get rid of the weeds for the bermudagrass to take over. "It costs a lot of money to dig ditches, and it's all wasted if a ditch gets clogged."

CMI's performance is measured in terms of percentage of kill, so the firm has to kill all trashy vegetation.

Governmental boards don't want to know about the weeds a herbicide doesn't get—they want to see the weeds cleaned out—period.

"Trees and woody underbrush are our biggest problem when it comes to permanent kill," McCoy says. CMI's tree removal technique involves injecting each tree with Croprider 2,4D amine, using a 2-inch pipe with a bit on the end and a pump as an injector. "We make a cut every two inches around the tree as close to the ground as possible," McCoy says. "It really does the job on willows and cottonwoods, although it's a little less effective than some other, hotter herbicides on hardwoods."

For general weed control on ditchbanks, CMI usually works with Daconate, Diamond Shamrock Chemicals' premium MSMA-surfactant formulation. The usual rate is about ¾-gallon of material per acre. "We really would like to combine the Daconate with a 2,4D for a really total kill," says McCoy, "but we're concerned that fumes from the phenoxy will get us in trouble with neighboring cottonfields or home gardens." One answer to that problem that McCoy is looking into is Dacamine, Diamond's completely non-volatile phenoxy.

A typical job for CMI is the Bayou Pierre ditchbank maintenance job. Awarded the contract to keep this ditchbank, which winds through

much of metropolitan Shreveport, free of noxious weeds, CMI found the weeds really growing rankly all along its length.

It would be some job—"The rough grasses like johnsongrass and other weeds were 2½ feet tall in most places," McCoy exclaims. "We saw some bermudagrass growing in spots among the weeds, and felt if we could get the big weeds down the bermuda would come in and choke out most further weed growth."

Use of standard 2,4D materials alone or in combination with arsonates was out of the question, because the ditchbank backs up on some of the finest homes in the city, with their beautiful and highly susceptible expensive shrubbery.

Where it was possible, CMI went in with a tanktruck, spraying Daconate through a 30-foot boom. "We used a real high pressure — 400 pounds per square inch—to try to get a fine mist and high-saturation coverage, since Daconate is a contact herbicide and we needed as much contact as possible," McCoy says. Where the truck couldn't go, a long hose and hand-held nozzle was used to wet down every weed they could spot. Rate was about 60 gallons of spray solution per acre.

"Our plan," McCoy continues, "was to hit the ditchbank twice this year. First we sprayed it in the latter part of May when the temperature was up. Then we came back in the heat

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of August to get whatever young weeds sprouted since the earlier spraying." McCoy figures that two years of this program will clean up enough noxious weeds so that the bermuda will come in and choke out any remaining.

"Weather plays a big part in how well your herbicide application will do," McCoy adds. "We need a day without rain after spraying, and like to have temperatures of 75 degrees or better. In fact, the hotter it is the better it works."

Checked out after the first Dacotane application, the Bayou Pierre ditchbank showed ample evidence of CMI's success. Almost all of the tall, waist-high johnsongrass was gone, and bermudagrass was coming in strong. "That bermuda looks great," McCoy exulted. "Bermuda likes hot sun, light, water and nitrogen, and the johnsongrass was stealing all that until now."

Running five spray units, plus one barge to use in riverbank spraying, CMI handles something like 1,000 acres of weed-control work a year. "We usually have at least 12 men on the payroll year-round," McCoy says, "but during peak season we often go as high as 35 to 40."

It's a big job, keeping lowland Louisiana from reverting to a jungle.

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