

**INVADING SHORELINE PLANT THREATENS HABITAT
CITY TO WORK WITH OTHER AGENCIES TO USE SAFEST WAY TO REMOVE NON-NATIVE
INVASIVE CORDGRASS**

by *SUSAN FULLER, STAFF WRITER*

For 30 years an invader has been creeping along our shores, choking out native plants, destroying the homes of endangered birds and causing inland flooding.

Plans are afoot to eradicate the alien _ known as Spartina or cordgrass _ an aquatic plant that has increased fourfold in some Bay regions during the past three years. Treatment could start this autumn.

The city Public Works Department is collaborating with the East Bay Regional Park District and the California Coastal Conservancy's Invasive Spartina Project to develop a plan to control non-native spartina around the Island.

A new aquatic herbicide formulation and state money dedicated to counteracting the effects of piping Northern California water southward have put the eradication plans into gear.

"We've been working to get our technical ducks in a row," said Peggy Olofson, executive director of the spartina project. A significant step will be state approval of the herbicide imazapyr (known by the brand names Arsenal, for land applications, and Habitat for aquatic use), which Olofson expects in August.

"I believe it will be cleared," Olofson said. "In all studies, including ones specific to San Francisco Bay, toxicologists said it is more effective and less harmful to humans and wildlife than (the currently approved anti-spartina herbicide) glyphosate."

The next step is outreach to educate the public and hear their responses.

The spartina project "has thought this through a million different ways and come up with the least environmentally damaging method of eliminating the weed," Olofson said.

"Helicopter application has the least impact because you don't have people walking through the marsh, creating trails for cats or foxes," she said. Despite its zero-risk for residents and better eradication results in the marshes, Olofson doesn't expect helicopters to be well-received in Alameda.

Non-native spartina was planted in the 1970s in the Bay Area to control erosion, said Jim Barse of Public Works. The East Coast variety hybridized with the smaller West Coast plant, creating a more aggressive species that displaced native plants and grew into areas without plants, such as mud flats and sloughs.

The hybrid is clogging channels in the mudflats and approaching storm drain outfalls, causing a threat of flooding on the Island, Barse said.

The most critical areas in Alameda are around the Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary, on the opposite shore of Bay Farm Island and on the San Leandro Bay shore around Eastshore Drive and Fernside Boulevard, Barse said.

The plan for Alameda is to eradicate the plant in phases in order to improve the habitat for the endangered clapper rail, Olofson said. In the areas where spartina is removed, workers will dig channels and plant grindelia, a native marsh plant.

"We have a lot of clapper rails in the marsh that don't have a place to go," Olofson said. "We don't want to remove too much (vegetation) at once. Leaving some in place and creating channels will create more cover to reduce the impact on the clapper rail."

Channels will also help drain the marsh and reduce mosquito habitat, she said.

For information about spartina, go to www.spartina.org.

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PHOTO caption:

Plans are under way to remove non-native grass that the overrun the Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary in Alameda and other **shoreline** areas. (Dean Coppola/Staff)