

## Getting Rid of a Green Invader

by Sandy Guldman

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The bad news is that invasive cordgrasses (*Spartina* sp.) are found throughout the tidal reaches of Corte Madera Creek; the good news is that we have a good chance to eliminate them, unlike many of the other non-native invasive species that live in our watershed.

In our watershed, native cordgrass, *Spartina foliosa*, and other native tidal marsh species are being displaced by invasive exotic species of *Spartina* and native/invasive hybrids. Some of these species, particularly the hybrid, are much more aggressive than the native species. Corte Madera Creek has three of the four invasive species of *Spartina*, which were introduced into the San Francisco Bay in the mid-1970s.

Invasive *Spartina* spreads by seed and from vegetative growth, and the hybrid can spread by more than 100% in a single year. Invasive *Spartina* has negative impacts on the biological and physical characteristics of tidal wetlands:

- It threatens special status species across taxonomic groups: the California clapper rail, migratory waterbirds, and shorebirds lose their foraging habitat. Anadromous fish, such as Chinook salmon and steelhead, lose important estuarine habitat. Salt marsh harvest mice lose their pickleweed habitat. Plants such as soft bird's-beak (*Cordylanthus mollis* sp. *mollis*) are crowded out. In all, 19 special status species are harmed by the *Spartina* invasion.
- It facilitates habitat conversion: Invasive *Spartina* density will increase to the point of turning tidal mudflats into meadows, decreasing habitat diversity. The invasive *Spartina* species can tolerate a broader range of tidal inundation than the native *Spartina foliosa*, so they crowd out not only native cordgrass, but also other common tidal marsh plants like pickleweed and saltgrass.
- It quickly fills open waterways and reduces navigable channels.

Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed have received funding from the California State Coastal Conservancy's Invasive *Spartina* Project (ISP), which is working to eliminate invasive *Spartina* in the San Francisco Bay estuary system. The project under way in Corte Madera Creek is part of this effort. More detailed information on the ISP and plans to treat invasive cordgrass can be found at [www.spartina.org](http://www.spartina.org). If you live in the lower watershed near tidal areas, you may have already received a letter from us about the project. We plan to hold a series of small meetings with neighborhood groups in January. A meeting for the general public



*Spartina* (at left) infests a small slough backing onto Berens Drive homes in Kentfield, where the clumps can be removed manually.



Where *Spartina* is growing among large rocks, as near the mouth of the concrete channel, herbicide will be carefully applied at low tide.

is scheduled for 7:00 p.m. on Monday, March 13. If you live near the creek and would like to arrange a meeting in January to discuss plans to treat the invasive cordgrass near you, call Sandy at 456-5052. Call the same number in February to find out the location of the March 13 meeting.

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