

Please call 1-866-invader if you suspect you have found this species

Smooth cordgrass
Spartina alterniflora

Other common names:

USDA symbol: SPAL
ODA rating: A and T



Introduction: Smooth cordgrass is perhaps the most destructive cordgrass to the Pacific Northwest as it grows in the open mudflats of estuaries. These mudflats are extremely valuable to birds, shellfish, fish and crabs. Their loss would be economically and ecologically significant. Unintentionally introduced in the early 1900's as packing material for oysters, the grass has spread up and down the Pacific coast. Much effort and money has been directed towards eradicating this plant.

Distribution in Oregon: Two historic sites were the result of intentional plantings, one from Siuslaw Bay, the second site in Coos Bay. A third site found near Warrenton on the Columbia River is our only wild introduction. All have been eradicated.

Description: Cordgrass is a salt-tolerant perennial aquatic grass species growing strongly erect to 5 feet tall. When young, the leaves are flat without a prominent midrib and tapering to a sharp tip. Stems are round with joints, hollow between the joints and often red at the base of healthy young plants. The roots are white and fleshy with underground runners (rhizomes) that spread outward aggressively. Flowers are arranged in compact spikes 10-20cm long. Seeds are produced in the fall and dispersed in water, though viability is usually less than a year. Smooth cordgrass grows on intertidal mud or sand flats that have minimal wave action; it can occur as low as eelgrass beds in the intertidal zone.

Impacts: Smooth cordgrass is the most dominant non-native cordgrass species in the coastal Pacific Northwest. Inhabiting the lowest intertidal zones in estuaries, the species poses the greatest threat to mudflats by creating grass monocultures, altering estuary hydrology and ecosystem functions through increased sediment accretion. By raising the elevation of estuaries by several feet, mudflats become grassland with food producing habitat for juvenile fish, crabs and shellfish becoming lost. Thousands of acres of mudflats in the Pacific Northwest, critical to migratory shorebirds and waterfowl are at risk. The largest West Coast infestations are located in San Francisco Bay, CA and Willapa Bay, WA.

Biological controls: Biological control agents are not used on "A" listed weeds in Oregon. This weed is targeted for eradication.

