



European Beach Grass

What is European beach grass?

European beach grass is the non-native grass seen covering large areas of our beaches and dunes. It is native to the coasts of Europe and northwest Africa. It is a very hardy plant, able to live in even the most arid environments.

What does it look like?

European beach grass is fast growing and prolific. It grows to a height of two to three feet and can spread up to ten feet each year. The roots of this plant spread under the surface in a shallow mat-like manner, which creates a firm, wide grip in the loose sand. The long narrow blades of the plant are rough to the touch on the top and smooth on the bottom, and roll inward during dry periods to conserve water. Between late July and early August, it grows a seed-head resembling a wheat stalk. European beach grass is a xerophyte, which means that it can survive in very dry conditions, like those encountered in sand dunes.

If European beach grass lives naturally on the European coast, what is it doing here?

This plant was imported in the early



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1900s to stabilize shifting coastline sand dunes. It has spread along the West Coast from San Luis Obispo County north into Canada.

What is the problem?

European beach grass grows much more quickly than native plants, outcompeting them for water and space and forming dense stands in many places. This stops the natural sand movement and changes the shape of the dunes, affecting the entire dune ecosystem and destroying habitat for native dune plants, insects, and animals. Several sensitive dune plant species and nesting habitat for the western snowy plover, a small shorebird, are jeopardized by European beach grass.

What is being done to stop the spread?

Removal is a challenge. Manually, the grass and roots are cut about six inches below the surface, and the plants are weakened by expending their energy reserves trying to resprout. All resprouts must be removed and the area monitored constantly for a few years to ensure effective removal. Extensive infestations may require heavy equipment for initial plant removal as part of a coordinated, comprehensive, well-planned and funded effort. This is an extremely labor-intensive job, but near-eradication may be possible in a few years, depending on the site.

What can I do?

Give your support to large removal projects. Ask park managers about opportunities to volunteer to help with manual removal.

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