



Grassland Invaders

Over the last 200 years, non-native grasses have taken over California's grasslands. Fire suppression, livestock grazing, crop agriculture, and other human activities have allowed aggressive exotic grasses to spread, forcing native grasses out. They have changed grassland ecosystems, degraded habitat for native plants and wildlife, decreased natural biodiversity, and increased the danger of wildfires throughout the state.

Veldt Grass

Native to South Africa, veldt grass was introduced to California in the 1940s. Widely used for forage improvement and erosion control during the 1950s and 1960s, it was planted on ranches and controlled burn areas in sandy coastal areas of central California. The wind-dispersed seeds spread quickly and easily, and the plant now

threatens the habitat of the rare Morro shoulderband snail.



Veldt grass

Harding Grass

From the Mediterranean area, drought-tolerant Harding grass was introduced to improve livestock forage. Wind and animals spread seeds short distances, while long-distance spread occurs through human activity. In wildland habitats, Harding

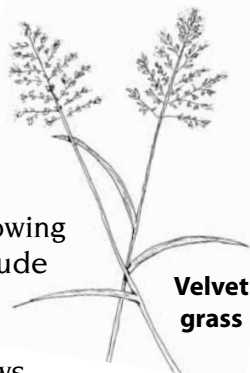


Harding grass

grass out-competes and displaces native plant species, and can present a greater fire hazard in summer.

Velvet Grass

Introduced from Europe in pasture seed mixes, velvet grass escaped from cultivation. It now invades moist, disturbed areas, growing in dense patches that exclude native vegetation. Gray-green and covered with soft hairs, velvet grass grows as clustered stems up to three feet tall. Purplish plume-like flowers produce many seeds that are spread by clinging to animals, as well as to park visitors and their horses. Seeds may remain viable for over ten years.



What can be done?

Park visitors can help keep non-native species out of natural areas by being weed aware: clean clothing and equipment before entering a park, and be sure horses and pack animals and their feed are weed-free. Many physical, biological and chemical methods are being tested and used in the parks to battle against exotic grasses, including pulling by hand, mowing, burning, and using herbicides.

Exotic grasses are tenacious; once they colonize an area, it is extremely difficult to remove them so that native plants can return to the area. Though combinations of control methods have proved effective, no method is certain to eliminate these intruders that are quickly changing the ecosystem, making it difficult for native plants and animals to survive.