



Lower Ellsworth estuary, Willapa Bay. Note the black stubble patches at the edge of the high marsh that were once spartina clones.

HARLEY SOLITES

## AROUND THE STATE

### Fully protecting biological diversity means working in partnership and acting on a large scale.

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#### SOUTHWEST WASHINGTON

##### **Invasive spartina in Willapa Bay meets its match**

Spartina, or cordgrass, crowds out habitat for shorebirds and waterfowl, and threatens the state's shellfish industry. Growth of the fast-spreading weed exploded in Willapa Bay during the 1980s, and within the last few years it has infested around 20,000 acres.

But the tide in the spartina battle is starting to turn, thanks to an eradication effort by The Nature Conservancy and a host of others, including U.S. Fish and Wildlife; Washington's state Departments of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Fish and Wildlife; the Shoalwater Bay Tribe; the Pacific County Noxious Weed Board; and the Shellfish Growers Association.

More than \$3.3 million in federal and state funding has been spent on the effort within the last two years. It is the world's largest invasive-weed eradication in an estuarine area, says Len Barson, the Conservancy's deputy director of external affairs.

The results have been encouraging. Up to 95 percent of the 10,000 acres of large, solid spartina meadows has been successfully treated, says Kim Patten, extension professor for Washington State University. Treatment of the other 10,000 acres where spartina has spread is also working, Patten adds.

The work will need to continue for as much as another decade to take care of spartina regrowth and the other areas where it has spread. But, Patten says, "Everyone can see the light at the end of the tunnel."