

decades, populations of non-native cordgrasses were introduced to the Estuary and rapidly began to spread. Although valuable in their native settings, these introduced cordgrasses are highly invasive in new environments and frequently become the dominant plant species. In particular, the non-native cordgrass species Atlantic smooth cordgrass (*S. alterniflora*) and its hybrids, formed when this species crosses with native Pacific cordgrass (*S. foliosa*), are now threatening the ecological balance of the Estuary. In the Estuary, Atlantic smooth cordgrass is likely to choke tidal creeks, dominate newly restored tidal marshes, impair thousands of acres of existing shorebird habitat, and eventually cause extinction of the native Pacific cordgrass.

Once established in the Estuary, non-native invasive cordgrass could rapidly spread to other estuaries along the California coast through seed dispersal on the tides. Non-native invasive cordgrasses are spreading rapidly in the Estuary and currently dominate 500 acres of mudflats and tidal marshes on State, Federal, municipal, and private lands. The Spartina Control Program proposes to implement a coordinated, region-wide eradication program, consisting of a number of on-the-ground treatment techniques that should stave off this invasion. The Spartina Control Program will be focused within the nearly 40,000 acres of tidal marsh and 29,000 acres of tidal flats that compose the shoreline areas of Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, Sonoma, and Sacramento counties.

At this time, three alternatives have been developed for full analysis: (1) Regional eradication using all available control methods in an integrated vegetation management (IVM) approach, (2) regional eradication using only non-chemical control methods in a program of IVM, and (3) no action (continued limited, regionally uncoordinated treatment). A fourth alternative, no control program at all, did not meet the purpose and need for the action and was removed from further consideration.

Alternatives 1 and 2 would employ a variety of manual and mechanical treatment methods including: (a) Hand-pulling and manual excavation; (b) mechanical excavation and dredging; (c) pruning, burning, and mowing; (d) smothering (blanketing); and (e) drowning and draining cordgrass. In addition to these methods, Alternative 1, the Preferred Alternative, would also employ application of herbicides in suitable situations. Both Alternatives 1 and 2 would incorporate a modified

IVM approach by: (a) Using all available information regarding the estuarine ecosystem and cordgrass physiology and ecology; (b) combining this with the awareness of likely economic, ecological, and sociological consequences of the cordgrass invasion; (c) implementing a program that is effective and economical; and (d) protecting public and environmental health.

Because NEPA and CEQA have different requirements for some compliance elements, the Draft EIS/R was prepared to comply with whichever law's requirements were most stringent. The Draft EIS/R also identifies necessary permits and approvals from local, State, and Federal agencies, and includes supporting environmental documentation for the permits. Efforts will be regionally coordinated with appropriate natural resource agencies in order to develop a program that minimizes disturbance to sensitive habitats and species. The Final EIS/R will respond to comments received during public review of the Draft EIS/R and identify the Spartina Control Program alternative to be implemented. A copy of the Final EIS/R will be made available to all who commented on the Draft EIS/R and anyone requesting a copy.

(Authority: National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*); Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (40 CFR 1500–1508)).

Mary Ellen Mueller,

Acting Deputy Manager, California/Nevada Operations Office.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force Northeast Regional Panel Meeting

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: This notice announces a meeting of the Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) Task Force Northeast Regional Panel. The meeting topics are identified in the **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**.

DATES: The Northeast Regional Panel will meet from 1 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday, May 21, 2003, and 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Thursday, May 22, 2003.

ADDRESSES: The Northeast Regional Panel meeting will be held at the Bluenose Inn, 90 Eden Street, Bar Harbor, ME 04609. Phone 207–288–3348.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Susan Snow-Cotter, 617–626–1202 or Sharon Gross, Executive Secretary, Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force at 703–358–2308.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Pursuant to section 10(a)(2) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App. I), this notice announces a meeting of the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force Northeast Regional Panel. The Task Force was established by the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990.

The Northeast Regional Panel was established on July 25, 2001 to advise and make recommendations to the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force on issues relating to the Northeast region of the United States. Geographically, the Northeast region is defined to include the jurisdictions of the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York. The Northeast Regional Panel will discuss several topics at this meeting including: updates of state and provincial ANS Management Plans; review of the rapid response workshop; updates and work plans of the Ballast Water Committee, Communication, Education, and Outreach Committee, the Policy and Legislation Committee; and the Science and Technology Committee; discussion on establishing research priorities for invasive species in the Northeast; discussion on a marine database; updates from the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force and National Invasive Species Council on national issues; an update on reauthorization of the National Aquatic Invasive Species Act; an update on pet industry outreach efforts; and other topics.

Minutes of the meeting will be maintained by the Executive Secretary, Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force, Suite 810, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Arlington, Virginia 22203–1622, and will be available for public inspection during regular business hours, Monday through Friday.

Dated: April 4, 2003.

Jack Arnold,

Acting Co-Chair, Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force, Acting Assistant Director—Fisheries & Habitat Conservation.

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