

LOCAL

[Print] [Email] **Non-native weed taking root in San Mateo County****By: Katie Worth**
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San Mateo County officials are trying to get a handle on an invasive weed that has taken root in the county that they say, if left unchecked, will radically change the forest ecosystem on the Peninsula and beyond.



The weed — a short, innocuous-looking bunch of grass called slender false brome — is native to Europe, Africa and Asia. It was introduced to Oregon in the early 20th century and in the 1990s spread over tens of thousands of acres in Western Oregon. The thick-growing plant has been very problematic there because it chokes out native species and it's proven difficult to eradicate.

Invasive: Ellen Gartside of the Regional Open Space District, takes samples of slender false brome grass that's causing problems in San Mateo County. (Juan Carlos Pometta Betancourt/Special to the Examiner)

In 2004, the plant was discovered near Woodside in San Mateo County. Officials say it's not clear how the plant made the jump from Oregon, but it's now believed to have spread over about 100 acres.

Julie White, who owns 7 acres of property near the Thornwood Open Space Preserve, estimates that about two of those acres have been infested with the weed. She said she's tried to tackle the problem and has periodically spent hours hand-pulling the weeds, but said she hasn't yet made major progress against it.

"The biggest problem is, I have a stream going through my property and the seeds come down the stream from the properties above me each year," she said. "I can pull every day and I'm going to get it reseeded naturally every year. It's very disheartening because you work like mad and you know it's coming again."

Environmental managers worry the hardy plant could proliferate across the county and throughout the Bay Area if they don't respond aggressively, according to Leigh Ann Maze, spokeswoman for the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District.

The problem is, neither the district nor the county has the authority to force private property owners to eradicate the plant, Maze said. Instead, the district has begun a program that reimburses property owners who volunteer to do the removal themselves.

When the grass was found at the Thornwood preserve, located between Portola Valley and Woodside, district employees began a plan of eradication, mainly by painstakingly pulling out plants by hand.

At this point, most of the weed has been removed from the Thornwood preserve — although it reseeds each spring.

Gail Raabe, San Mateo County's agricultural commissioner, said it was good that the plant was discovered before it had the chance to spread to a point that it would be impossible to control.

"That's very unique," she said. "Usually by the time you get your forces together to be dealing with one of these invasive weeds they're all over the place."

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