



Friends of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge

Press Release:

Senator Patty Murray visits Willapa National Wildlife Refuge to review spartina control program

Senator recognized by regional conservation and business for championing control of invasive species on Willapa Bay

Naselle, WA – Thursday, April 24, 2003 – Supporters of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge hosted Senator Patty Murray today in a tour and inspection of the equipment and plan for spartina control on the Refuge. Regional business and community leaders recognized the senator for her support of the Willapa Refuge and the invasive species control program that aims to eradicate spartina cordgrass and reverse its harmful impact on the conservation and economic interests of Willapa Bay. Joined by Refuge staff and local volunteers, the senator inspected the various amphibious tractors, airboats, and precision targeting equipment that will be deployed in the complex choreography of control methods for spartina on the Refuge.

Charlie Stenvall, Project Leader for the Willapa Refuge Complex, acknowledged the difficult fight for spartina control that is being waged on the Refuge. “Part of our inspiration is that our technology and control plan allows us to identify every spartina concentration around the Bay and efficiently and methodically tackle the problem.” Stenvall noted that the senator’s support was instrumental in “helping to fund the acquisition of equipment and hiring of additional personnel who will team up in this summer to implement the next phase of our multi-year control plan.” Kim Patten, of the Washington State University Extension Service, and Dick Shelton, of the Willapa Bay–Grays Harbor Oystergrowers’ Association, echoed Stenvall’s comments about the comprehensive preparation that has gone into the spartina control plan and the appreciation for Senator Murray’s continued support. “Your staff has done a great job in understanding the issue and working to fund a solution,” declared Shelton. “The cooperation from the federal and state agencies involved in working with us on this plan has been exceptional,” commented Patten. Pacific County commissioners Bud Cuffell and Pat Hamilton also shared their appreciation for the senator’s support.

Bev Arnoldy, President of The Friends of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge, a non-profit organization dedicated to support the Refuge, awarded Senator Murray an Honorary Membership in the Friends organization in recognition for her and her staff's advocacy of Refuge programs. "The Senator fought for spartina control funds throughout a long and difficult fiscal budget debate," noted Arnoldy, "Our environment overall and our Refuge in particular have a champion in Senator Murray." Len Barson, Director of Government Relations for The Nature Conservancy of Washington, echoed Arnoldy's comments in noting the cooperation between the Willapa Refuge and the Conservancy's adjoining Ellsworth Slough property. "We fully support the Refuge's mission to be good stewards of the Bay and its surrounding lands. We are proud to be here with you in support of spartina eradication."

Senator Murray was impressed with the enthusiasm and commitment of the volunteers, businesspeople, and government agency staff present at the event. "Your efforts to protect and enhance this special place for future generations from the threat of this invasive species are enormously appreciated. My staff and I are proud to have contributed to this program at Willapa and to the Refuge system everywhere. These are national treasures that deserve our broad support."

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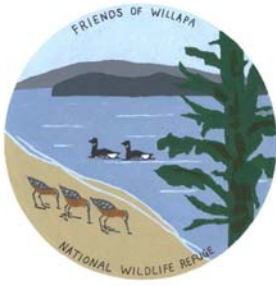
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About Spartina Control at Willapa National Wildlife Refuge

The FY2003 federal budget includes \$1 million for spartina control on the Refuge. Over 3,000 acres of the worst infested areas will be tackled this summer, beginning with the mudflats at the southernmost reaches of Willapa Bay. A tightly-scheduled treatment program will commence in June, eventually reaching all infested areas in the southern and eastern extremities of the Bay and continuing through Long Island Sound. These areas are prioritized for treatment in 2003 because infestation there has expanded dramatically and the habitat is considered especially fertile for new spartina seed stock. Treatment of the south Bay will also defend the gains made last season when nearly 500 acres of spartina meadow and 900 acres of clone fields were successfully treated in pilot programs. The benefit for migrating birdlife will be immediate: the south Bay is ranked as the most valuable bird habitat in Willapa.

The intensity with which the spartina will be battled this year is suggested by the equipment list and personnel assignments already being scheduled for summer work: Two amphibious tractors will be equipped with Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) -guided infrared precision spray booms. Six airboats will be outfitted with spray tanks. Thirteen part-time hires will complement Refuge staff in round-the-clock shifts when summer tide conditions allow ideal drying times for maximum benefit of chemical sprays.

The technology being used to fight spartina brings the most effective and efficient weapons to the spartina fight. The GPS-guided precision sprayers were tested last year under grant programs in part sponsored by the Friends. They enable operators to identify and spray individual spartina plants faster, using far less herbicide than with other efforts.

This year's treatment is part of a six-year program to fully eradicate spartina from the Bay. The overall management plan for control is the product of considerable planning and collaboration amongst interested government and private organizations. The plan is jointly authored by USFWS Willapa Refuge management with support from the Washington State Department of Agriculture, Willapa Bay-Grays Harbor Oyster Growers Association, Pacific Coastal Shellfish Growers Association, Coastal Resources Alliance, and the Willapa Bay Water Resources Council.

About Willapa National Wildlife Refuge

Willapa Bay is the largest estuary in the northwest United States region outside Puget Sound, covering approximately 88,000 acres at high tide with over 100 miles of shoreline. The Bay is the defining geography for the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge, which comprises nearly 14,000 acres of upland forest, tidelands, beach dunes, freshwater marshes, diked grasslands, and other wetland habitat.

Aquatic habitats and grasslands on the Refuge support migratory populations of literally hundreds of bird species such as black brant, trumpeter swans, Canada geese, scaup, canvasback, bufflehead, scoters, and American wigeon. The Refuge also hosts some of the largest concentrations of shorebirds on the Pacific Coast, including the endangered western snowy plover and marbled murrelet. Black bear, black-tailed deer, Roosevelt elk, bats, bobcats, and grouse can be found in the forests and upland habitats. The cool, wet climate of Willapa Bay makes the area a "hotspot" of amphibian and fish diversity, where Refuge habitats support over half of the 24 native amphibians that occur in the state and provide spawning grounds for chinook, coho, and chum salmon, steelhead, and cutthroat trout.

Willapa is one of over 500 national wildlife refuges in the United States operated by the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife. The National Wildlife Refuge System is the only national network of public lands in the world set aside specifically for the conservation of fish, wildlife and plants. Encompassing 93 million acres, the Refuge System boasts more units than the National Forest System and more acres than the National Park System. The Refuge system celebrates 100 years of conservation success in 2003, its Centennial Year.

About the Friends of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge

The Friends of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge is a non-profit 503 (c) (3) organization dedicated to support and enhancement of Willapa Refuge programs. The Willapa Friends is one of over 220 volunteer groups nationwide who partner with local refuge staff to support specific Refuge programs. Nearly 200 individual and corporate members support Willapa Friends' education, maintenance, advocacy, and general assistance activities under direction of Refuge staff.