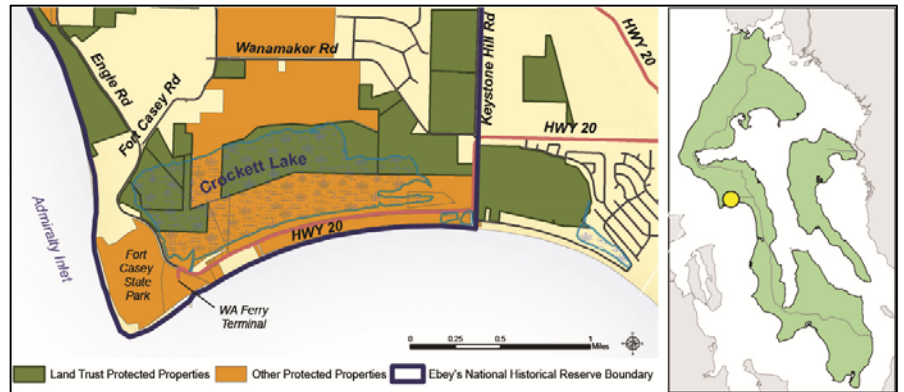


# Crockett Lake Wetland Preserve

## Noxious Weed Removal Project

### Project Background

Over the past 12 years, the Whidbey Camano Land Trust has been privileged to work with willing landowners to create the Crockett Lake Wetland Preserve, protecting 493 acres. Another 345 acres of adjacent land is in public ownership, primarily State Parks. We're working now to enhance and restore the natural functions of this valuable wetland system, including portions where non-native vegetation has choked out many beneficial native plants.



### Noxious Weed Problem

Most of the Crockett Lake protected area is healthy marsh and open water habitat, a wonderful place for the birds that call Crockett Lake home. However, there is an ever-growing noxious weed problem on the east portion of the Preserve. The main culprit is hairy willow-herb; there is also poison hemlock, blackberries and thistle.



What is it? Hairy willow-herb is a semi-aquatic perennial herb covered with soft hairs. It grows up to six feet tall and has showy pink-purple flowers with white centers and notched petals. Hairy willow-herb reproduces in two ways—by wind dispersed seeds and vegetatively with its thick rhizomes (underground stems). It generally flowers from July through August.

Why is it a problem? This weed invades and overwhelms moist areas and shorelines. The aggressive growth of this plant crowds out native wetland plants, creating tall monotypic stands where nothing else can grow and greatly reducing the native habitat critical for more than 230 species of birds, including migratory birds.

Hairy willow-herb can be found in a wide range of moist soils, including wetlands, ditch and stream banks, low fields, pastures, and meadows. It is an exotic, aquatic species capable of disrupting the ecology of wetlands by altering food chains, hydrologic (water) cycles, and floral composition.

Unfortunately, the largest single infestation of hairy willow-herb in Washington State is in our Crockett Lake Wetland Preserve. Currently covering more than 100 acres, this noxious weed is quickly spreading across the rest of the 500 acre Crockett Lake wetland complex. Island County laws require that landowners remove this plant from their property since it is a Regulated Class B noxious weed. One of the reasons for our protection effort was to be able to restore the health of this wetland system which had been unmanaged for years by absentee landowners.

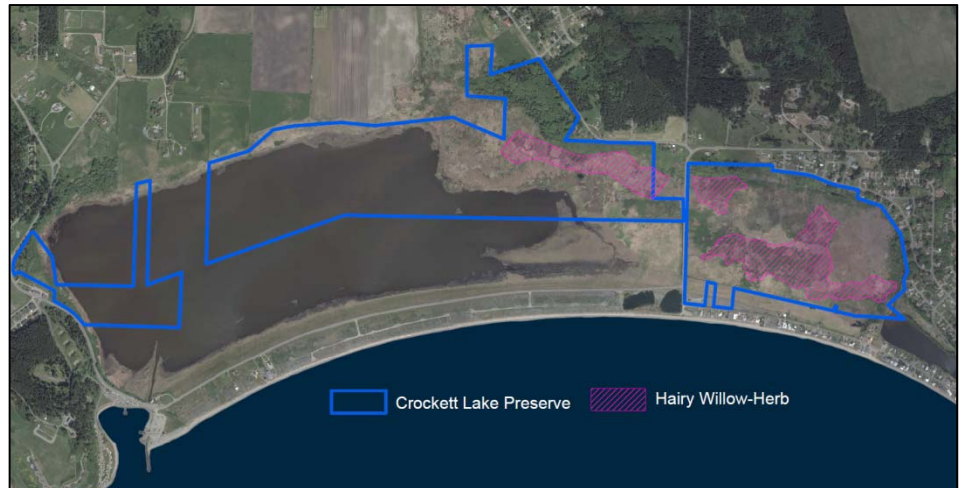
## Vegetation Management Plan

In preparation for this project, a comprehensive Vegetation and Drainage Management Plan was completed in early 2016. This plan looks at the entire Crockett Lake wetland complex and examines the vegetation issues. It provides an analysis of the different potential management options for control of the hairy willow-herb problem, as well as control of poison hemlock, Canada thistle, Himalayan blackberry, and other weeds that are also present on the Preserve.

Control measures will follow an integrated approach, combining manual removal, mechanical mowing, and chemical herbicide treatments. It is important to us that we effectively battle this threat to the wetland and that we use the best available science to make informed decisions. All herbicide treatments have been approved by appropriate agencies.

### Phase 1 Removal – Spring/Summer 2017

Thanks to funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office, the Land Trust is able to complete the first phase of the noxious weed removal starting in April 2017. We've partnered with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to use their trained crews and specialized equipment.



Since the work is taking place on soft soil, a piece of equipment called a MarshMaster will be used. This machine (pictured at right) allows for travel across wetlands while limiting surface disturbance. The WDFW crew will be using a brush-cutter to cut back Himalayan blackberry in April/May and will return in June/July to conduct the first round of approved herbicide treatments on the hairy willow-herb.

In addition to this work, the Land Trust will be conducting work parties with volunteers to do manual removal of hairy willow-herb in areas where native plants would be impacted by the herbicides. The Phase 1 removal area will cover the majority of the 100 acres impacted, focusing first on the main homogenous (solid) stand of hairy willow-herb which is close to 50 acres.



MarshMaster used in mudflats and wetlands to do restoration work.

### Future Phases

Removal of noxious weeds is not an easy or one-time task. The same area will need to be treated again in 2018 and 2019. After that, native plants will be planted on the site to encourage growth and diversity of native species that are beneficial for wildlife. The Land Trust will be continuing to monitor and conduct work parties on the Preserve between these major treatment phases. Even after the plantings are finished, continued diligence will be needed to nurture the site and to monitor for additional infestations.

**Questions?** For more information contact Jessica Larson our Land Steward at [Jessica@wclt.org](mailto:Jessica@wclt.org) or 360-222-3310.