

RAVENNA GRASS, also known as Hardy Pampas Grass



The National Park Service is controlling a non- native grass population in the Colorado River corridor in the Grand Canyon because populations of this large (3 m tall), Eurasian bunchgrass dramatically increased in the Grand Canyon from 1987 to 1992. First documented near Lees Ferry in 1981, 55 populations between Lees Ferry and Diamond Creek in 1992.

In Moab it is planted as an ornamental grass in many areas – and lately it has spread and popped up in a number of places including at the mouth of Negro Bill Canyon and along many roadsides in Spanish Valley.

Ravenna grass germinates in a wide variety of soil and canopy cover conditions, is highly competitive, and provides little bird and wildlife cover, all of which make it a threat to riparian habitats. Although the threat of ravenna grass invasion to the mainstream riparian zone is significant, the real ecological danger is that this species can dominate places like Mill Creek where it can form dense stands.

In California and New Zealand, Pampas Grass (a different genus and species from Ravenna Grass, but with similar growth habits) has already formed dense stands in riparian and coastal areas. Once it forms these dense stands it becomes much harder to remove. It is also becoming a threat to coastal areas of Maui.

Pampas and Ravenna grass can be controlled in very similar manners, and it is always easiest to control it when the infestation is small. First steps can be removing seed heads to halt spread immediately. It can be killed with herbicide or by digging up the plants. Care must be taken with mechanical removal that creek banks are not destabilized during removal. Mechanical removal is easiest and most effective when the plants are small.

There is a “sterile” form of pampas grass available in some nurseries that has been known to do well in Moab. This plant is considered to produce 99% sterile seeds. With a plant that produces over 1 million seeds per plant, however, the 100,000 non sterile seeds still have potential to establish plants in unwanted areas like Mill Creek.

Efforts are being made in Moab to remove Ravenna grass from creekside areas. It may become important for Grand County to declare Ravenna grass a noxious weed if it continues to spread.

