

INVASIVE SPECIES

Phragmites/Common Reed Grass (*Phragmites australis*)

Phragmites is a large perennial grass standing from 2 to 4 metres (6 to 13 feet) tall. Its stems are rigid, smooth and hollow and up to 2.5 centimetres (1 inch) in diameter. Its leaves are 25 to 50 centimetres (10 to 20 inches) long and 1.5 centimetres (half an inch) wide. Phragmites exhibits an extensive rhizome network and roots grow to a depth of 1 metre (3 feet). The seeds of Phragmites are brown and thin with long, narrow bristles attached to each seed. Phragmites has a plume-like and feathery flower head.



Concern

While many populations of Phragmites are stable and pose little threat to other species, Phragmites is often regarded as an aggressive invader. Where Phragmites occurs, it is typically the dominant plant species, out competing all other species. Rapid expansion of Phragmites causes habitat change. Large, dense, monotypic stands of Phragmites may lead to a loss of biodiversity and loss of habitat for wildlife including staging, breeding or feeding waterbirds. Phragmites has a tendency to reduce plant biodiversity by replacing communities of common cattail, marsh meadow, sedge/grass hummock, and other mixed emergent plants.

Distribution

Phragmites is found globally on every continent except Antarctica. Historically, Phragmites was a minor component of North American wetland communities. In the past two centuries, the presence of Phragmites has greatly expanded in North

(Left) Phragmites grow between 6 and 13 feet tall



Indian Grass

America since new, more invasive genotypes of Phragmites were introduced from the Old World. The cause of the expansion is not fully understood but both genetics and environmental factors may play a role. Phragmites will grow in most soil types and is often found in roadside ditches and along railroad tracks.

Propagation

Phragmites is capable of vigorous vegetative reproduction and spreads largely by rhizome fragments. Fragments may be carried to a new area in soils, on machinery or by floodwaters. Phragmites can also colonize new sites by seed but this is less common as the seed of Phragmites is generally not viable.

Control

Like all invasive species, Phragmites is difficult to control. Possible control methods include: cutting, burning or chemical treatment. Cutting back the plants can be effective

Canada Bluejoint

at reducing spread but only if done properly. If cutting takes place at the end of the growing season or in winter, it can serve to increase the density of Phragmites. Another control method is prescribed burning. This method has only proven effective if the roots burn. However, root burn rarely occurs since the rhizomes are usually covered with mud or water. Chemical control is another option but herbicides are not always effective at reducing the spread of Phragmites and should only be used in the most responsible, informed, and legal manner.

Alternatives

The following is a list of native tall grasses that are acceptable alternatives to Phragmites:

Indian Grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*)

Big Bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*)

Prairie Cord Grass (*Spartina pectinata*)

Canada Bluejoint (*Calamagrostis canadensis*)

Conservation Halton Natural Champion for a Healthy Watershed



Conservation Halton is the community based environmental agency that protects, restores and manages the natural resources in its watershed. Conservation Halton has staff that includes ecologists, land use planners, engineers, foresters and educators, along with a network of volunteers, who are guided by a Board of Directors that includes municipally elected and appointed citizens. Conservation Halton is recognized for its stewardship of creeks, forests and Niagara Escarpment lands through science based programs and services.

For more information on Phragmites/Common Reed Grass and other Invasive Species contact Conservation Halton:
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