

Phragmites (Common reed)

Phragmites australis



Phragmites (Common reed) is an invasive reed species found in Ontario. It was introduced to multiple times to North America in the 1800s, it is native to Eurasia. Phragmites grow well in wetland and sandy areas and can be commonly found along Ontario's major highways, secondary roads, and Great Lakes coastal habitats.



The invasive Phragmites can grow up to 5m in height and in densities of 200 stems/m². Typically, they flower from August to September and can spread through their rhizomes, stolongs, and seeds. Their seed heads are dense and purple-red in colour. Phragmites leaves are blue-green, flat, and arranged alternately, with leaf blades that gradually taper to a 45-degree point. Their stems are hollow, tan, and 0.5 to 1.5 cm in diameter.



The spread of invasive phragmites can be slowed down by staying on trails that have invasive stands. Brushing off clothing when leaving an area that has invasive phragmites can help prevent introducing the seeds to a new area. Reporting sightings of phragmites through apps such as iNaturalist or EDDMaps can help inform future invasive species management projects.



Phragmites can spread very quickly, crowding out our native vegetation. It can release toxins through the roots into the soil, inhibiting the growth of surrounding plants. A mature plant can produce thousands of seeds in a year, further increasing their spread. Phragmites can create lower water levels where they stand. This is because the water is being transpired at a faster rate than native vegetation due to the density of their growth.



In Ontario we have beautiful native grasses that can be planted alternatively to the invasive Phragmites. These include; Big Bluestem, Indian Grass, and Switchgrass.