

Invasive Phragmites

(*Phragmites australis* ssp. *australis*)

About

Phragmites are a type of tall reed grass that is commonly found in wetlands and open water areas. There are two sub-species in Canada: the **native** *Phragmites australis* ssp. *americanus*, and the **highly invasive** *Phragmites australis* ssp. *australis* (aka. Common Reed), native to Eurasia.

Problem

When invasive Phragmites invades, it establishes rapidly and forms tall, dense monocultures that outcompete native plant species and reduce food and habitat for various wildlife species. Stands of invasive Phragmites have underground stems called rhizomes that 'sprout' new plants and large seed heads which make removing/managing the plant very difficult. Areas with invasive Phragmites have less plant AND animal diversity and are less resilient. Stands that grow along roadways and recreational vehicle trails are also a safety hazard as they block sightlines and pose a fire risk.



Large stands of invasive Phragmites along a creek in New Brunswick.

Help stop the spread!

Invasive Phragmites populations are increasing throughout the Maritimes, with large densities found in the Southeastern part of the province. This plant can spread when seeds or fragments of the underground stems are transported to new places, such as when plant parts gets stuck on equipment and tires or when contaminated fill is moved.

Tips for prevent the spread:

- **CLEAN** your gear and any motorized equipment (lawn mowers, ATV's) before entering & leaving the recreation site
- **STAY** on designated roads & trails
- **LEARN** to identify invasive Phragmites and **REPORT** it!
- **CHECK** any soil or fill being moved doesn't contain invasive species parts

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How to identify invasive Phragmites

- Very tall (>2m) grass compared to native grasses, with a large “fluffy” flowerhead
- Dead stems and flowerheads will remain throughout the winter, stems are very rigid
- Forms dense monocultures, with no native vegetation growing in the stand
- In winter, can be easily identified as it is still standing and much taller than other native grasses



Plants will die off late fall and leaves will turn yellow, but rigid stalks and flower heads will remain.

Common Look-a-Likes



Native Phragmites (*Phragmites Australis* *subsp. americanus*):

- Grows more sparsely than invasive phragmites, will have other species intermixed
- Flowerheads are less dense and full, can see individual branches



Reed Canary Grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*):

- Much smaller than Phragmites (60–120 cm), with less leaves and a more pronounced stem
- **Long, slender** flowerheads that are dense and unbranched



Brome Grasses (*Bromus* spp.):

- Much **smaller** than Phragmites (60–120 cm), with similar shaped flowerheads
- Stems are not rigid or tough, and break easily

Reporting

Have you seen invasive Phragmites in New Brunswick? Report your invasive Phragmites observations through the iNaturalist mobile app or online at <http://inaturalist.ca>. Make sure to take photos of the whole plant and other ID features to add to your observations!



References/Informative Links

- New Brunswick Invasive Species Council: <http://nb invasives.ca>
- Ontario Invasive Plant Council Phragmites page: <https://www.ontarioinvasiveplants.ca/invasive-plants/species/phragmites/>
- Nature Conservancy, Common Reed: <https://www.natureconservancy.ca/en/what-we-do/resource-centre/invasive-species/common-reed.html>