

Another Invasive Plant Following our Roads

by Gray Merriam

That tall reed with the flag on top that you are seeing along our roadsides is called Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*). It is an alien from Europe and Asia.

It leaps along road by pieces of rhizome (roots) being moved by us (road ditch mowers, graders, front end loader buckets) or by water. Then it spreads locally by rhizome growth at up to two metres a year.

Phragmites can overpower other marsh plants, just as cattail and purple loosestrife do.

In early autumn, the season's production of food is moved to the rhizomes and stored over winter.

Once established, this reed is difficult to control but early colonies can be eliminated by cutting at the end of July before the year's production of food has been moved out of the stems and leaves and stored in the roots. Remove the cut plants to prevent sprouting and you can take away its year's production. Repeat that a few times and the plants will starve. Get the timing right. Let the plants work hard all summer then steal what they have produced before they can store it for next year.

The same treatment can slow the spread of established colonies.

The Kawartha Lake Stewards together with the Otonabee Region Conservation Authority and the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters are applying this control in their area.