

# Weed Awareness

## Lancaster County Phragmites— Native or Non-Native

Common reed, *Phragmites australis*, a relatively new invader of Nebraska's riparian areas, is rapidly expanding its range in Nebraska to the detriment of native wetland communities. In the past ten years it has shown up along the entire Platte River and Republican River systems. Almost 100 miles of the Platte River from North Platte to Kearney have solid stands of phragmites on banks, adjacent wetlands and islands. It is spreading at an alarming rate. Common reed is reducing the flow capacity of the streams and impacting wildlife such as cranes, waterfowl, least terns and piping plovers. The clogging of the streams will increase the threat of floods as rainfall returns to normal or above. It is a heavy water user. The scattered infestations along the Lower Platte River have been doubling in the past three years and will become solid stands if not controlled. This expansion has gone pretty much unabated until this past year.

The Lower Platte Weed Management Area, a ten county cooperative and coordinated group, began purple loosestrife control four years ago along the Lower Platte River and soon became aware of invading infestations of phragmites coming from upstream and began control efforts. Weed Management Areas on the Republican and Central Platte River basins began strong control efforts this past fall with grant funding recently provided by LB 701. Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) director made an emergency designation of phragmites as a noxious weed in the Republican River Basin to aid in this effort. Cass County has made phragmites a county-designated noxious weed.

There are native and introduced phragmites. The introduced phragmites is much more aggressive. The phragmites found along the Platte and Republican Rivers seem to be introduced stands.

### Lancaster County Situation

There are stands of phragmites along upland streams and wetlands in Lancaster County. A survey is being made of these stands and an attempt is being made to determine if they are native or introduced stands. So far, 32 stands on 63



acres have been found as shown on the map. This survey will continue. Native and non-native determinations will be made. All reported stands of phragmites will be inspected and added to the survey, if found to be phragmites. This information will be used to decide if to seek a county designation as a noxious weed.

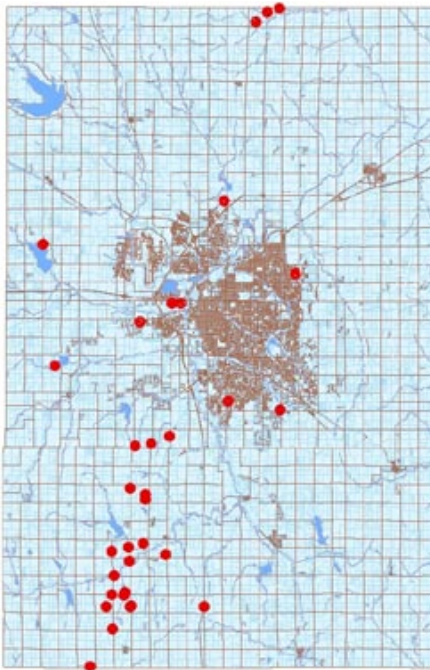
### Identification

Phragmites is characterized by its towering height of over 15 feet and its stiff wide leaves and hollow stem. Its feathery and drooping inflorescences (clusters of tiny flowers) are purplish when flowering and turn whitish, grayish or brownish in fruit. They wave like plumes in the breeze. Flowering occurs from July-October.

Phragmites is a colonial plant, spreading by rhizomes (underground stems) and capable of forming large stands or colonies arising from one or a few seeds or plant pieces. These colonies form along the margins of streams and in marshes and ditches. They can form in wetlands and in disturbed areas and their aggressive growth and tendency to outcompete other plants and form monospecific (one species) stands creates concerns.

### Control

At this time no means of biological control are available in the United States for treating phragmites infestations. HABITAT™ and Glyphosate-based herbicides (e.g., Rodeo®) are the most effective control method for established populations. If a



Phragmites sites in  
Lancaster County in 2007

population can be controlled soon after it has established, chances of success are much higher because the below-ground rhizome network will not be as extensive. Herbicides are best applied in late summer/early fall after the plant has flowered either as a cut stump treatment or as a foliar spray. It is often necessary to do repeated treatments for several years to prevent any surviving rhizomes from resprouting. When applying herbicides in or around water or wetlands, be sure to use products labeled for the purpose to avoid harm to aquatic organisms.

Any suspected infestations of phragmites should be reported to the authority.

## Should Phragmites be Designated a Noxious Weed?

Consideration is being given to designating phragmites a noxious weed in Nebraska. Phragmites is becoming a serious problem in wetlands and river basins across the state. The most affected river basins are the Platte and Republican. In 2006, counties reported that 20,765 acres were infested with phragmites. Several weed management areas across the state have secured funding through numerous grants to apply control measures not only to phragmites, but also to saltcedar and purple loosestrife.

On Aug. 3, 2007, phragmites was declared a noxious weed in the Republican River Basin. This was done to facilitate two projects funded by LB 701 (water legislation passed last year). These two projects are for vegetation removal from the streambed that is impeding the natural flow of the river. This vegetation, including phragmites, is having a major effect on the delivery of water to Kansas as required by a river compact. Additional streambed management projects are anticipated on the Platte River

using state and federal funds. It is felt that a statewide designation of phragmites is needed to facilitate these projects and other control efforts in stemming this rapidly expanding, invasive weed.

Comments are being sought regarding adding phragmites as a noxious weed. The article above describes the situation in Lancaster County as we know it now. Anyone wishing to make comments—please provide them to the Lancaster County Weed Control Authority by e-mailing [lpracheil@lancaster.ne.gov](mailto:lpracheil@lancaster.ne.gov) or calling 441-7817.

## Lancaster County Weed Control Web Site



The Lancaster County Weed Control Authority Web site at [www.lincoln.ne.gov/cnty/weeds](http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/cnty/weeds) provides very useful information about the Authority's program and activities and about weed control and management. The site is continually being updated. Via the Web site, you can:

- Contact the Weed Control Authority.
- Make a weed complaint.
- Make a real-time search of current weed inspections.
- Look at a map of noxious weed locations in the county.
- See the latest listing of possible weed special assessments.
- Study noxious weed and weed abatement laws and regulations.
- Learn about noxious weed identification.
- Read about the County Noxious Weed and City Weed Abatement Programs.
- See plans and reports.
- Check on noxious weed controls.
- Learn about managing natural areas in an urban setting.
- Test your knowledge about Nebraska weeds.
- Link to other weed control Web sites

## Weed Free Forage Certification Program

You can prevent potential noxious weed infestations by insisting on Certified Weed Free forage. As a buyer, you should be aware that noxious weed infested forage products can cost you hundreds or even thousands of dollars down the road. Ask your forage supplier to have their hay certified prior to harvest. Forage growers must call the Lancaster County Weed Control Authority one to two weeks prior to harvesting. There is no charge for the field inspections. There is a small charge for the cost of bale tags.

Nebraska carries out its Weed-Free Forage Certification Program in accordance with the standards of the North American Weed Management Association standards.

Certified weed-free forage products include: straw, alfalfa/grass hay, forage pellets/cubes, alfalfa hay, grain hay and grass hay. Weed free forage is required on many U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands, in National Parks, Bureau of Reclamation land, military locations, tribal lands as well as National Fish and Wildlife refuges. The Nebraska Department of Roads requires weed-free forage on highway projects. Restrictions may apply to other lands administered by provincial, county, state or federal agencies.

### For More Information

If you have questions about certification regulations or weeds not allowed in certified forage, please see the North American Weed Management Association's (NAWMA) Web site at <http://www.nawma.org> for a complete list of weeds and regulations.