Common Reed

Phragmites australis Cav. Trin. ex Steud.

Native Origin: Europe

Description: A tall perennial wetland grass in the Grass family (Poaceae) ranging in height from 3 to 20 feet. Strong leathery horizontal shoots, called rhizomes, growing on or beneath the ground surface give rise to roots and tough vertical stalks. Cane-like stems, 1 inch in diameter, support broad sheath-type leaves that are .5 to 2 inches wide near the base, tapering to a point at the ends. Large dense, featherlike, grayish purple plumes, 5 to 16 inches long, are produced in late June to September. The plant turns tan in the fall and most leaves drop off, leaving only the plume-topped shoot. The root system is comprised of rhizomes that can reach to 6 feet deep with roots emerging at the nodes. Common reed reproduces by spreading rhizomes that form large colonies.

Habitat: Common reed thrives in sunny wetland habitats. It grows along drier borders and elevated areas of brackish and freshwater marshes and along riverbanks and lakeshores. The species is particularly prevalent in disturbed or polluted soils with alkaline and brackish waters, but will tolerate highly acidic conditions. It can grow in water up to 6 feet deep and also in somewhat dry sites. It can be found along roadsides, ditches, open wetlands, riverbanks, lake shores, dredged area, and disturbed or undisturbed plant communities.

Distribution: This species is reported from states shaded on Plants Database map. It is reported invasive in CO, CT, DC, DE, GA, IN, KY, MD, MI, NC, NH, NJ, NY, OH, PA, TN, VA, VT, and WI

Ecological Impacts: Common reed has become a destructive weed, quickly displacing desirable plants species such as wild rice, cattails, and native wetland orchids. Invasive stands of common reed eliminate diverse wetland plant communities, and provide little food or shelter for wildlife. Its high biomass blocks light to other plants and occupies all the growing space below ground so plant communities can turn into a *Phragmites* monoculture very quickly.

Control and Management:

- **Manual**- Common reed can be cut and the rhizomes can be dug up but physical control is difficult because it can reestablish from seed or remaining rhizomes. Frequent mowing is sometimes effective on control of common reed.
- **Chemical**- It can be effectively controlled using any of several readily available general use herbicides such as glyphosate. Follow label and state requirements.
- **Biocontrol**: There is no known biological control for common reed, although goats are known to forage on many types of emergent vegetation.

References: http://www.vnps.org/invasive/invphrag.htm
http://aquaplant.tamu.edu, www.nps.gov, www.forestimages.org, http://plants.usda.gov, Czarapata, Elizabeth J. Invasive Plants of the Upper Midwest, An Illustrated Guide to their Identification and Control, 2005, p. 78-80, www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/phau1.htm

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Invasive Plants website: http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/invasive_plants