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Environmental and Geographic Information Center
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Invasive Plant Information Sheet



Common Reed *Phragmites australis* Grass Family
(Poaceae/Gramineae)

Ecological Impact: Common reed is a rapidly growing wetland grass that thrives along freshwater and brackish marshes, riverbanks, and lakeshores. It is particularly prevalent in disturbed or polluted soils along roadsides and in ditches and dredged areas. In undisturbed sites, it can be non-invasive. Common reed quickly establishes and displaces native vegetation. Dense stands provide cover and nesting sites for marsh wrens, swamp sparrows, and red-winged blackbirds, but deter short-grass nesters like willet and seaside sparrow, a species of special concern in Connecticut. Standing dead stems that persist through the winter create a fire hazard.

Control Methods: The most effective control method for Common reed is to prevent establishment by minimizing land disturbance and water pollution. Land management practices that guard against erosion, sedimentation, fluctuating water levels, and nutrient loading in wetlands offer the best long-term protection. Once established, Common reed is very difficult to eradicate. In coastal marshes, reintroducing tidal flow can limit growth, as the species is sensitive to salt levels. Otherwise, control of established stands is possible using a combination of cutting or burning and herbicide treatment.

Mechanical Control: Small, newly-established populations can be hand cut to remove above-ground stems. Digging up plants is labor intensive and not recommended since digging tends to spread rhizome fragments which generate new shoots. Cutting greatly reduces rhizome reserves. Large stands can be mowed or controlled with prescribed burns. A follow-up treatment is needed the second year to control resprouts. Afterwards, cutting or burning should be repeated every three to five years. Burns are best conducted in the winter when standing dead stems provide abundant fuel.

Chemical Control: This method is most effective if done in early fall when plants are translocating nutrients to the rhizomes. Cut stems about two inches above ground level and immediately pour a 25% solution of glyphosate (Rodeo™) and water into the hollow stems. Roundup™ should not be used as it is not approved for use in wetlands. Keep in mind that a DEP permit is required for herbicide use near water. Glyphosate is a non-selective herbicide that will kill all vegetation. By pouring Rodeo™ directly into cut stems, the herbicide is contained and damage to native plants is prevented. Stem cuttings with attached plumes (seed heads) should

be bagged and removed from the site. This will help prevent the spread of seeds. Cuttings can be burned or composted, as composting temperatures will kill the seeds. A follow-up treatment is generally needed at the end of the second growing season to control resprouts.

Biological Control: Currently, there are no known biological control methods. Two insect pests, a lepidopterous stem borer (*Rhizedra lutosa*) and a chloropid (*Lipara similis*), have shown significant impacts in some research sites. Continued research is needed to determine whether an effective biocontrol program is possible.

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