

SUBJECT: The need to control invasive Common Reed (*Fragmites australis*)

Given by Judith Grant

On behalf of The Federation of Tiny Township Shoreline Associations

I'm here to ask that the Township take a leadership role in controlling an invasive plant called Common Reed or *Fragmites australis*. This is the weed that is now growing in patches in ditches and low spots in many parts of Southern Ontario and that arrived at points on the shore of Tiny Township and began to establish a vigorous presence several years ago. It is a tall plant, somewhat like a bamboo in that it puts out a long thin leaf at each node. It sends out runners on the surface of the ground that put down roots at each node. Like an iceberg, the plant is largely underground – some 80% in the case of *Phragmites*. In August it puts out a plume of tiny flowers, followed by a plume of light brown seeds, which stay on the plant and gradually disperse right through the winter.

Common Reed is a concern for many reasons. While it begins in low wet areas – along streams, in ditches, at the shore where wet sand is exposed by falling water levels --

- it can take over a wetland
- its stands can get in the way of the exchange of sand between the lake and the dunes and can interfere with dune growth
- it creates a wet beach
- it crowds out native plants
- it reduces access for swimming
- it can grow as tall as 15', getting in the way of the view
- it reduces shore property values
- it creates a potential fire hazard during the dormant season when its stocks are dry

It has become a serious problem because it propagates so easily. If you break the runners between the nodes, each set of roots becomes a new plant. If the rhizomes are fragmented by heavy machinery or by waves, each piece becomes a new plant. Its stocks and detritus mat together and make it impossible for other plants to grow.

In Michigan, it has become such a serious problem – taking over wetlands and stretches of the Lake Michigan shore -- that the State has instituted aerial spraying and cutting programs to control its spread. Fortunately for us, Michigan has published a useful 38-page handbook titled “A Guide to the Control and Management of Invasive Phragmites.” Many other areas have designated invasive Phragmites as their most serious invasive species.

Last summer at the Caring for Our Beaches Conference, we were all warned to be on the look out for this invasive plant in literature distributed by both the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre and by the Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation. And when we alerted our member associations to look for it in an e-mail soon after the Conference, we soon learned that it had gained many footholds along the shores of Tiny both on privately held and on Township-owned land.

But it was only when preparatory research was being done for an article in this spring’s Tiny Cottager that we learned of the Michigan experience and of how dangerous this plant can become.

We have a chance to rein it in before it takes over, but we need to act quickly and it is not going to be easy. Judging by what we’ve read, what’s needed is

- to educate shore property owners and Township staff who manage shore parks
- a knowledgeable person to whom to report patches of Common Reed and get advice
- people knowledgeable in how and when and what to spray and in how to undertake an effective cutting program
- permissions, from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans since the Common Reed is often found below the 178 metre line, and probably also from MNR
- funding from other levels of government

- a carefully orchestrated plan of attack, which should include working with Wasaga and Penetanguishene. (The Wasaga Beach Park Superintendent is already aware of the problem and would like to work with Tiny)

It is going to take time to get permissions and to get an effective program in place, so I urge you to act quickly. Our reading of the literature suggests that spraying should be done by professionals in the first week or so of August following by cutting, again by professionals, a couple of weeks later.

The longer we leave it, the more established this invasive plant becomes. We are aware of one modest patch that in five years has grown to 600 feet. We are aware of a number of stands of it on private land. With regard to Township owned land, there is a large stretch on the beach at Wahnekewening, another at Cawaja, another at the 8th, and there are probably many more.

We have put together a list of contacts at Fisheries and Oceans, Environment Canada, the Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation, various branches of MNR, the Terrestrial Invasive Species Outreach group, and the Interim Ontario Invasive Plant Council, which should be of assistance to staff as a plan is developed and permissions sought.

We urge you to act now, so that at least a good beginning can be made this summer, in curbing this opportunistic plant.