



SPECIAL REPORT

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PHRAGMITES IDENTIFICATION

The Euro-Asian reed that is invading North American wetlands has given Phragmites a bad reputation. Not all varieties of this reed are bad. Before any thought can be given to abatement of invasive phragmites we must determine which variant of this species of plant we are dealing with. Native Phragmites variants has been part of our wetlands and fens for thousands of years. They co-exist with their non-grassy neighbours; providing food and shelter for a diversity of wildlife. It is important we learn to recognize the differences between native and invasive plants so we can focus on managing the invasive variant without doing harm to our native wetland plants.

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NATIVE AND INVASIVE PHRAGMITES

We make our decision on which type is present using a combination of characteristics and try not to depend on a single trait. Characteristics in appearance and habit can overlap. These tables work best on mature examples. New growth is more difficult to distinguish.

CHARACTERISTIC	NATIVE TYPE	INVASIVE TYPE
stem colour	reddish, glossy	tan, dull
sheath	split or missing by late summer	retained into the following year
stem diameter	narrower	wider
green leaf colour	tending to yellow	tending to blue
seed head	feathery, smaller	full, bushy
maximum height	around 12'	around 18'
leaf angle to stem	tending to 90°	tending to 30°
leaf-sheath ligule	wider	narrow
canopy cover	open	closed

HABIT OF NATIVE TYPE	HABIT OF INVASIVE TYPE
located in undisturbed wetlands & unpopulated areas	found in disturbed & populated areas and in roadside ditches
Understory composed of a variety of different native plant types	Understory almost non- existent. Growth is a dense thicket of stems
flowering occurs in mid- summer	flowering in late summer & early fall
leaves can show spotting and herbivory	leaves remarkably intact & untouched

NATIVE PHRAGMITES ON WHITE LAKE

NATIVE PHRAGMITES- HAYES BAY:

Open canopy with an understory of native plants present. It is located in an unaltered wetland.



NATIVE PHRAGMITES- HAYES BAY Green Leaves tending to yellow



Leaf angle tending to 90° to the stem. Seed heads are feathery



NATIVE PHRAGMITES- HAYES BAY :

Sheaths are splitting away from the stem. Many stems have dropped their sheaths. Lower portions of stems are glossy, smooth and tending to a distinct reddish hue that can extend a metre or more.



INVASIVE PHRAGMITES ON WHITE LAKE

INVASIVE PHRAGMITES- Three Mile Bay: large full seed heads with a closed canopy



Three Mile Bay: Dense stalks with no undergrowth. Leaves tending to 30° to the stem. Dead seed heads are from the previous year.



INVASIVE PHRAGMITES Three Mile Day:

Long broad lance like leaves with a dark bluish-green colour. Very pristine leaves with no evidence of mold nor herbivory.



Sheaths are a dull tan tightly clinging to stalks



THREE MILE BAY: a new cell **“Which one am I?”**



On the [White Lake Science & Information](#) website you can find more reports on invasive plants and animals that are present on White Lake.

Information for all of Ontario’s invasive plants can be found on the [Ontario Invasive Plant Council](#) Website. You will find videos, webinars, manuals and guides for the management of many invasive plants including phragmites.