ENVIRONMENTALLY HARMFUL WETLAND PLANTS OF CONCERN IN NORTHERN WI

Prepared by Vilas County Land & Water Conservation Department, spring 2014

Common reed grass *(Phragmites australis)*

Also known as common reed grass, ditch reed, giant reed

When to look: Year round as dead brown leaves from previous growing season remain standing throughout winters. Spring prompts new growth of leaves and summer flowers.

Where to look: Freshwater marshes, river edges, shores of lakes and ponds, roadsides, disturbed areas.

Key features: Phragmites is a tall perennial grass. The non-invasive strain native to WI is typically found in small, low density populations of plants 6 – 10 feet tall, whereas the non-native, invasive phragmites forms large, dense stands attaining a height of 10 - 15 feet or more that includes both live stems and standing dead stems from the previous growing season. Stems are round and hollow growing from stout, creeping rhizomes. Leaves are light green in early summer turning to light brown in fall, flat, 1-1.5 inches wide at their widest point, elongate, tapered to a point and attached to the stem by smooth sheaths. Flowers, grouped into spikelets borne on highly branching purple inflorescences, form bushy panicles in mid to late summer and are usually purple or golden in color. As seeds mature, the panicles begin to look “fluffy” and take on a grey sheen due to the hairs on the seeds. Roots form dense networks of rhizomes several feet deep. Plant spreads horizontally by sending out stolons and rhizomes, above and below ground, that can grow 10 or more feet in a single growing season. Distance dispersal is by seeds, stem fragments from mowing, and rhizomes.

Sources for additional information:

http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/invasives/fact/phragmites.html

http://www.great-lakes.net/envt/flora-fauna/invasive/pdf/phragmites_glc_factsheet_2011.pdf

http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/pdf/phau1.pdf