

# Longmeadow's Least Wanted!

## Common Reed, *Phragmites australis*



**Origin:** Preserved remains of native *Phragmites* that are 40,000 years old have been found in the southwest indicating that it is a part of the native flora of that region. In coastal areas, preserved rhizome fragments dating back 3,000-4,000 years have also been found in salt marsh sediments indicating that it is also native to these habitats.

**Identification / Habitat:** A tall, perennial grass that can grow to over 15 feet in height. In North America, both native *Phragmites* and introduced subspecies are found. Introduced *Phragmites* forms dense stands that include both live stems and standing dead stems from previous year's growth. Leaves are elongate and typically 1 to 1.5 inches wide at their widest point. Flowers form bushy panicles in late July and August and are usually purple or golden in color. As seeds mature, the panicles begin to

look "fluffy" due to the hairs on the seeds and they take on a grey sheen. Below ground, *Phragmites* forms a dense network of roots and rhizomes which can go down several feet in depth. The plant spreads horizontally by sending out rhizome runners that can grow 10 or more feet in a single growing season if conditions are optimal.

**Dispersal:** An individual plant can produce up to 1,000 seeds ever year that can be distributed by wind or waterways. Below ground, *Phragmites* forms a dense network of roots and rhizomes. The plant spreads horizontally by sending out rhizome runners that can grow 10 or more feet in a single growing season if conditions are optimal.

**Problems:** The plants high biomass blocks light to other plants and occupies all the growing space belowground so plant communities can turn into a *Phragmites* monoculture very quickly. *Phragmites* can spread both by seed dispersal and by vegetative spread via fragments of rhizomes that break off and are transported elsewhere. New populations of the introduced type may appear sparse for the first few years of growth but due to the plant's rapid growth rate, they will typically form a pure stand that chokes out other vegetation very quickly. There is a native species, *Phragmites americanus*, which closely resembles the invasive. Usually the native species co-exists with other wetland species and is found in undisturbed areas, where the introduced invasive species becomes a total monoculture, and is usually found in disturbed areas.



**Control:** Repeated mowing may be the best option in controlling small groups of this invasive. **Any removal within 100 feet of wetland resource areas, including certified vernal pools, or within 200 feet of a perennial stream may require approval from the Longmeadow Conservation Commission. Please contact the Conservation Commission *before* you begin!**