



## Assateague's Least Wanted

### *Phragmites australis*



#### Guilty as charged...



Phragmites (pronounced frag-MY-teez) or Common Reed is an invasive, non-native grass species that has become well established on Assateague Island in recent years. Hundreds of acres of once diverse and thriving coastal plant communities are now infested by dense stands of phragmites. Local hydrology (water chemistry, flow and filtration) has been altered, scenic views have been blocked and the risk of wild fire has increased. Once invaded by phragmites, these areas no longer provide suitable habitat for many native species. Waterfowl and other wetland birds disappear and fish nurseries decline as entire plant communities are replaced by phragmites.

*"There can be no greater issue than that of conservation in this country."  
-Theodore Roosevelt*

#### A hostile takeover...

Organisms are considered **non-native** (alien, exotic, foreign, introduced, non-indigenous) when they occur in locations beyond their known historical natural ranges. Non-native typically refers to species brought in from other continents, geographic regions, ecosystems and even other habitats. The most important aspect of a non-native plant is its adaptability to a new environment. An **invasive** species is one that displays rapid growth, displacing

existing plants and allowing it to establish over large areas. Free from natural controls present in their native lands, including herbivores, parasites, and diseases, **non-native, invasive** plant species exhibit rapid and unrestricted growth in new environments. Their phenomenal growth allows them to overwhelm and displace existing plants and form dense, single-species stands.

#### A Line in the sand...

In response to the threat posed by phragmites, Assateague Island National Seashore has developed a project designed to identify and treat infestations.

In order to begin to manage phragmites, many infested areas will be aerially treated with an aquatic approved herbicide during 2008.

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**Habitat® for habitat...**

Habitat®, a commercially available, biodegradable herbicide has been selected for use during these treatments. Habitat's® active ingredient, imazapyr, has been approved by the Environmental Protection Agency for use in and around aquatic environments. Habitat® dries

quickly and binds to treated vegetation. Treatments take place during the latter half of summer after which treated vegetation turns brown and dies. Later, during the following spring, treated areas will begin to heal and green up with native vegetation.

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**Are the treatments safe for visitors?**

Yes. During the actual herbicide application, Assateague Island National Seashore staff will temporarily close portions of the park in order to assure visitor safety. Treatments will only occur

under suitable climatic conditions, thus eliminating any risk of exposure. Habitat® is only active for a brief period while it is drying, after which it is safe to enter the treated area.

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**What about the wildlife?**

Wildlife is not adversely affected by these activities. The island's horses and deer vacate areas prior to treatment since they are unaccustomed to the presence of low flying aircraft.

Actually, horses and deer have recently been shown to be influencing the phragmites invasion. Research has

revealed that phragmites responds to grazing by significantly increasing the number of runners and shoots it produces. This process effectively reduces the amount of time it takes for an area to be taken over by phragmites, making effective management even more challenging to accomplish.

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**From phrags to riches...**

The successful treatment of phragmites infested areas will create the right conditions for the recovery of an intricate mosaic of native coastal communities. Areas presently infested by phragmites will once again be occupied by native forests, marshes and shrub lands.

As a result, the island's original inhabitants, the plants and animals that have always called Assateague home, will return to these areas, and thus restore the native diversity that had once been lost.

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**Where can I learn more?**

You can obtain more information about phragmites by visiting the following websites:

[www.nps.gov/plants/alien/](http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/)  
[www.mdinvasivesp.org](http://www.mdinvasivesp.org)

More information about Habitat® can be found by visiting:

[www.vmanswers.com](http://www.vmanswers.com)