

“B” Rated Weeds

A weed of economic importance which is regionally abundant, but may have limited distribution in some counties

Common reed
Phragmites australis

Other common names: giant reed, phragmites, giant reed grass, Roseau cane, yellow cane

USDA symbol: PHAU7
ODA rating: B



Introduction: Common reed is native to Africa and temperate portions of Asia and Europe. This plant has been widely introduced and naturalized in New Zealand, U.S., Canada, Melanesia, and Polynesia.

Distribution in Oregon: Large populations of common reed can be observed in Umatilla, Morrow, Multnomah, Columbia, Clatsop and Klamath Counties with a mix of native and non-native lineages. Plant stands may have come from propagules washed down from infestations on the Lower Snake river and near Moses Lake, Washington.

Description: Common reed is a large perennial grass species with creeping rhizomes and stolons, and terminal, plume-like flowering stalks. This plant has woody hollow stems that can grow 1-4 meters tall. Leaves are 15-40 cm long with an open leaf sheath. Phragmites grows in sites that hold shallow water, including roadside ditches, marshes, swamps, brackish estuaries, and alkaline wetlands. Reproduction is primarily vegetative, through an extensive network of rhizomes, which can grow horizontally up to 1.8 m per year depending on the climate. Stolons are produced in young stands or over open water, growing up to 11cm per day, and further aid in rapid stand expansion and dispersal during storm events. Seeds are shed from November through January and are dispersed by wind, water, and animals. Once seeds germinate and become established, young plants persist for at least two years where they resemble many other grass species. When seedlings establish in inland or low salinity areas, the infestation will typically expand radially, resulting in distinct circular patches. Long distance seed dispersal is accomplished by water, wind, and wildlife.

Impacts: Common reed in Oregon inhabits wetland and estuaries and other areas of adequate moisture. The most severe impact from invasion would occur in healthy estuary plant communities where common reed would dominate and exclude important native vegetation.

Biological controls: There are no approved biocontrol agents for common reed.

