**COMMON REED**

**PHRAGMITES**

**Common Name:** Common reed (giant reed, canegrass)

**Growth Form:** Grass

**Life Span:** Perennial

**Origin:** Native and Europe

**Season:** Warm

**Reproduction:** Rhizomes, stolons, rarely by seeds

**Height:** 1–6 m (3.3–19.7 ft)

**Inflorescences:** Panicles (15–50 cm long, 5–20 cm wide), plumelike, much-branched; branches and top nodding at maturity; tan to purplish

**Spikelets:** Florets 3–8; lemmas sharply pointed (1.1–1.6 cm long), without hair, veins 3; lowest floret male; upper florets sterile; florets exceeded by the hairs of the rachilla

**Awns:** Fertile lemmas awned

**Glumes:** Unequal; first glume 3.6–6.2 mm long, veins 3; second glume 6.8–8.5 mm long, veins 3–5

**Sheaths:** Round, open, smooth, margins with fine hairs

**Ligules:** Ciliate membrane (1–3 mm long), backed by both short and long silky hairs

**Blades:** Flat (15–60 cm long, 1–6 cm wide), tapering to long-attenuate tips; margins serrate, without hair; upper surface ridge-veined, lower surface without hair or sparsely hairy

**Culms:** Erect to ascending, round (5–20 mm in diameter), robust, hollow, without hair

**Rhizomes:** Extensive (up to 10 m in length), stout (up to 2 cm in diameter), scaly

**Stolons:** Robust, may be 20 m long or more

**Where Found:** Throughout the Great Plains forming dense stands in wet and moderately fertile soils along banks of ponds, lakes, streams, marshes, roads, ditches and in wet fields. (NE, SD, ND, KS, OK, TX, MN, IA, MO, MT, WY, CO, NM, AB, SK & MB)

**Uses and Values:** It is readily eaten by cattle and horses when it is immature. Historical: Pieces of the stems were used to make pen points in early America. Some Native Americans used common reed for thatching, mats, and arrow shafts.

**Other:** Characteristics of introduced common reed include a dense inflorescence; yellow, oval rhizomes; persistent leaf sheaths in fall; and tan, rough stems. Native common reed has a sparse inflorescence; white, round rhizomes; leaf sheaths that are easily detached in fall; and red to chestnut, smooth stems.

Identification between native and non-native common reed can be difficult at times. Contact your local county weed control superintendent for assistance.
Non-native common reed can be found throughout the state in stream and river channels, drainage ditches, and shores of lakes and ponds. While these are typical sites to find common reed, isolated infestations have been documented in drier sites.

The most serious infestations of common reed are found primarily in the Platte River basin. However, numerous isolated infestations are found in the Republican River basin.

A dense stand of common reed out-competes native plant communities and alters the conveyance of water by channelizing the river channels creating vegetated sandbars. Natural river flows are restricted, thus making the areas susceptible to flooding during high water events.

**IMPACT OF COMMON REED**

**CONTROLLING COMMON REED**

**Mechanical and Cultural Control**

Stands of common reed can be suppressed by mowing and/or grazing. Mowing reduces the plant’s vigor, but continuous mowing is necessary to keep the stand in check. Mowing activities produce numerous small plant parts that are capable of resprouting, thus possibly increasing new shoots. This method should be used for short-term control until more effective methods can be applied. The use of cattle or goats has shown mixed results in containing dense stands of common reed. Vegetation should be grazed early in the growing season and continually grazed throughout the season. This method can suppress seed production as well as stressing root reserves of the plant. An intensive grazing program is a must and should be continued over several growing seasons.

**Biological Control**

Currently, there are not any approved biocontrol agents for the control of non-native common reed.

**Common Reed Control Summary**

A combination of two or more control methods is the best approach when controlling common reed. By utilizing several control options, your odds become greater that more common reed will be controlled. Common reed is capable of reproducing by seeds and root fragments. Existing infestations can spread vegetatively, not only by its extensive root system, but also by the plant’s capability to send out extensive rhizomes that grow over 30 feet in length. Continued monitoring and follow-up control measures are essential for maintaining common reed infestations at an acceptable level. Vigilance is necessary to identify new infestations and effectively control them when the patches are small and there is a possibility of total control. A follow-up program is necessary for several growing seasons to control escaped plants and new seedlings.

**Herbicide Control**

The use of herbicides can be an effective tool to assist in controlling noxious weeds. A person needs to identify the problem and the appropriate herbicide for the plant as well as the site that the plant is growing. If the noxious weed infestation is severe and scattered across a large area, then a broadcast application may be warranted. However, if the noxious weeds are in patches or a few scattered plants here and there, a person may be able to spot treat individual plants or patches. This approach requires less herbicide and has minimal impact on native plants and the environment. Controlling noxious weeds with herbicides is only one tool and should never be the only control option.

Additional information regarding herbicide use can be found through the Nebraska Cooperative Extension EC130 (Guide for Weed, Disease, and Insect Management in Nebraska) or your local county weed control authority at neweed.org.

**Panicles are plumelike, much-branched, densely flowered, and tan to purplish in color.**

**Ligule is a ciliate membrane, backed by both short and long silky hairs.**