



January 21, 2016

Honourable Kathleen Wynne, Premier
Legislative Building
Queens Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Wynne,

Re: Control of Invasive Species: *Phragmites australis* in Ontario

Conservation Ontario (CO) represents Ontario's 36 Conservation Authorities (CAs), which are local watershed management agencies that deliver services and programs to protect and manage water and other natural resources in partnership with government, landowners, and other organizations. As part of our mandate to conserve the environment for today and future generations, we have an interest in collaborating to facilitate effective, efficient and environmentally responsible management of European Common Reed or invasive *Phragmites australis* (here after referred to as *Phragmites*) in Ontario.

Phragmites is a rapidly spreading grass that can reach heights of five metres or more and is considered by reputable scientists to be the most aggressive invasive species of marsh ecosystems in North America and may be Canada's worst invasive plant. *Phragmites* poses a significant threat to biodiversity, society and the economy. It forms large, dense stands that negatively impact wildlife, block shoreline views and recreational access, pose fire risks, and impede drainage in roadside and agricultural ditches. There are no natural controls for *Phragmites* and therefore, human action is required to keep this plant in check. It is estimated that control projects in Ontario range between \$865 and \$1,112 per hectare (Ontario's Biodiversity Strategy, 2012) and that land managers in the United States spend over \$4.6 million per year restoring habitats impacted by *Phragmites* (Hazelton *et al.*, 2014). Because this plant grows so rapidly once established, the longer the plant is ignored the more effort and money is required to get it under control. Due to the significant, negative impact of this plant, non-action is not an option.

Invasive *Phragmites* has become so pervasive throughout southern Ontario that a large scale, well-coordinated effort is now required to achieve any meaningful results. To date, effective, efficient and environmentally responsible control efforts have been hampered by the lack of appropriate herbicides to deal with infestations in wet areas, the lack of a coordinated plan to stop continued spread, the lack of infrastructure to enable rapid response, the lack of financial and logistical support for community groups trying to deal with local invasions and the lack of an effective public education and awareness campaign.

During this past year the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR) has been actively engaged in addressing the challenges stated above. Staff involved on this file are to be commended for their tireless efforts in the process of getting the much-needed herbicides available in Ontario. However, without Ontario Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MOECC) support and commitment to obtaining the herbicides required to control *Phragmites* and allowing aerial application in specific locations, we will not be able to restore and protect these invaluable wetlands.

Further, the commitment and support of the Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO) is needed to address the increased presence of *Phragmites* along provincial highways. This must be dealt with in a timely fashion if we have any hope of dampening further spread into our natural areas.

We are requesting your support and assurance that all of our Provincial agencies will be supporting and working with MNR on the following initiatives:

1. Expedited and streamlined approval of herbicides to enable control over water. Legal chemical treatment options in Canada are limited to two products, Weathermax® and Vision®. Although both products are glyphosate-based, neither can be applied over water because they also contain the surfactant polyethyloxyated tallowamine (POEA) which is harmful to aquatic life. The most safe, effective and efficient control of *Phragmites* thus far has been in the United States and has been achieved using glyphosate and imazapyr-based herbicides which do not contain surfactants. With the proper permits, these products can be legally used there and be applied over water and, when used in combination, have been shown to have a control efficacy of up to 100 percent after one treatment. The ability to use these water-safe herbicides to control *Phragmites* in sensitive habitats in Canada will significantly reduce potential harm to wildlife and be far more environmentally responsible than the use of the products currently available. Having access to these products will also allow for control in wet ditches which are major spread vectors and will significantly reduce control costs and improve efficacy for numerous *Phragmites* management programs already underway. Political assistance is requested to help expedite the regulatory approval process to allow for safe products in Canadian aquatic environments by the 2016 growing season so that control efforts can begin in earnest and in a responsible fashion to protect our biodiversity, reduce control costs and reduce negative impacts.
2. Expedited and streamlined approval of aerial treatments. There is also a need, on a restricted basis, for aerial herbicide application to enable the control of *Phragmites* in large, remote, and difficult to access locations. This control option is available in the United States and has been shown to be the best option for controlling large infestations in their coastal wetlands. Without this tool, control of *Phragmites* currently expanding throughout a number of large, provincially- significant coastal wetlands will not be feasible. Political assistance is requested to expedite the regulatory approval process to allow for this control tool at specific sites.
3. Establishing a province-wide *Phragmites* control program. *Phragmites* management is achievable, but only with a well-funded, well-coordinated *Phragmites* control program that will ensure effective, efficient and environmentally responsible locally driven efforts are initiated and supported. Funding to support this program should come from and be shared by federal, provincial and municipal governments, as well as concerned citizens

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and environmental protection groups. Political assistance is required to financially and logistically support this initiative.

4. Controlling Phragmites along Provincial highways. Significant stretches of highways are infested with Phragmites which contributes to the continued spread of the plant to ecological areas. Control costs will only increase as *Phragmites* rapidly expands and therefore the sooner control efforts are implemented the more cost savings will incur. While substantial work is needed in southern Ontario, early control of *Phragmites* in northern Ontario and cottage country is important as well. Political assistance is required to make *Phragmites* control an annual priority within MTO.

Availability of the required tools, along with a large-scale, well-coordinated approach to this issue will help to protect biodiversity, reduce the impact on species at risk (SAR) and reduce the impact on Ontario's economy. This invasive plant can be dealt with effectively, efficiently and in an environmentally-responsible way but needs your support to make this happen. We are keen to collaborate on an effective control strategy. Without these efforts the loss of wetland habitat, reduction in biodiversity, impact on private landowners and impact on the economy will continue to increase.

Thank you for your consideration in supporting this issue. Please contact me at (519)376-6920 or Kim Gavine (General Manager, CO) ext. 231, if you would like to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,



Dick Hibma, Chair Conservation Ontario

Cc: Honourable Bill Mauro, Minister of Natural Resources
Honourable, Glen R. Murray, Minister of Environment and Climate Change
Honourable Steven Del Duca Minister of Transportation
Conservation Authorities of Ontario (Chairs, CAOs)