



## Why should I care and what is being done about invasive species here in Ontario?

By Eric Cleland

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In Ontario there are hundreds of invasive species and that's why Invasive Species Awareness Week (Feb. 28-March 4) is crucial. Invasive species impacts are varied - they out compete native sportfish, plants and animals, impact real estate prices and can even cause physical harm such as skin burns from Giant Hogweed sap. Let's focus on *Phragmites australis*, considered one of Canada's worst invasive species, to not only understand the impacts, but also celebrate success in managing an invasive species.

"Phrag" is a very tall and fast growing perennial grass now covering nearly 17,000 hectares of shoreline, wetlands and road allowances. It contributes to accidents by hampering sight lines at rural intersections and blocks municipal drains adding costs municipal budgets. It creates ecological dead zones and impacts all at-risk species – it is trouble in so many ways

In Ontario, many communities are fighting back, the term "Phragger" describes people on-the-ground working to control Phragmites. Ontario Phraggers are making incredible progress in Georgian Bay, Lambton Shores, Sunridge, Manitoulin Island, Long Point, Kincardine and other places where it impacts coastal property values. These local efforts and their evolving expertise contributed to new Phrag control methods like cut-to-drown and spading techniques developed right here in Ontario.

The "Phrag fight" triggered establishment of the Green Shovels Collaborative (GSC includes the Invasive Species Centre, Ducks Unlimited Canada, the Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, and the Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre) with a mandate to prevent and manage invasive species. The GSC cost-benefit analysis attributes a negative economic impact of over 470 million dollars to Phrag infestations.

Supported by hundreds of Ontario Phraggers, the GSC developed a sophisticated Provincial Framework to coordinate Phragmites prevention and monitor success. Developing the Framework did not stall GSC's community-level momentum as the newly created Invasive Phragmites Control Fund provided over \$100,000 to support community action on Phragmites, enabling Phraggers to purchase equipment and drive more on the ground response.

The battle against invasive species can feel really hard but we've shown it's possible. The GSC and the fleet of keen Phraggers pushing back against the spread on beaches, and in ditches and wetlands in northern and southern Ontario are demonstrating how to reduce the impacts of invasive species. The Ontario Phrag story is worth reflection during Invasive Species Week - we have the tools, but need political will, financial resources and manpower to do more. To become a "Phragger" or help in other ways contact me [eric.cleland@natureconservancy.ca](mailto:eric.cleland@natureconservancy.ca) and the Green Shovels Collaborative ([www.greenshovels.ca](http://www.greenshovels.ca)).

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**For more information, or to schedule interviews,** please contact Don Huff, President, Eco Strategy at [huffd@ecostrategy.ca](mailto:huffd@ecostrategy.ca) or call 416-805-7720.

**About the Green Shovels Collaborative:** Green Shovels is a collaborative of like-minded conservation organizations, and a collection of projects designed to achieve job creation, economic recovery, and environmental progress while addressing invasive species issues.