

**Ontario Phragmites Working Group
Annual Face-to-Face Meeting
March 3, 2016
University of Waterloo**

Present:

Jennifer Bowman, Royal Botanical Gardens
Heather Crewe, Ontario Good Roads Associations (RBG)
Scott Hodgins, BASF
Sue Gilpin, City of Hamilton
Sarah Poole, City of Hamilton
Greg Michalenko, Laurel Creek Headwaters Environmentally Sensitive Area Public Liaison Committee - Phragmites Group
Nancy Vidler, Lambton Shores Phragmites Community Group (LSPCG)
Karen Alexander, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF)
Mike Fair, Huron-Kinloss
Michael Irvine, MNRF
Kate Monk, Ausable Bay CA
Lesley Carpenter, Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)
Freda Klassen, Georgian Bay Association (GBA)
Dianne Watkins, Protect Our Water and Environmental Resources (POWER)
Lynn Short, Humber College
Emily Shaw, Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation (LHCCC)
Erin Lawrie, Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation (LHCCC)
Murray Purcell, Ministry of Transportation (MTO)
Brenda Rooney, Rooney Productions
Kyle Borrowman, Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters Invading Species Awareness Program (ISAP)
Ken Vegh, Town of Kingsville
Lu-Ann Marentette, Town of Leamington
Lindsay Dean, Town of Leamington
Steve Ford, Green Stream
Will Roberts, Engage Agro
Jill Crosthwaite, Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC)
Bill Cridland, Norfolk County
Rebecca Rooney, University of Waterloo
Courtney Robichaud, University of Waterloo
Graham Howell, **University of Waterloo**
Janice Gilbert, **OPWG**
Kellie Sherman, **Ontario Invasive Plant Council**
Deb Swidrovich, Laurel Creek Headwaters Environmentally Sensitive Area Public Liaison Committee - Phragmites Group

Conference line:

Dan Lebedyk, Essex Region Conservation
Amanda Moddejonge, OPWG
Bill MacDonald, LSPCG

1. Letter Campaign and Petition Update

- Online petition hosted by Change.org (https://www.change.org/p/kathleen-wynne-approve-essential-herbicide-tools-to-control-phragmites-and-establish-a-control-program/share?utm_medium=email&utm_source=notification&utm_campaign=new_petition_recruit)
- Promoted the link to the petition in social media posts, including paid posts
- Signatures jumped dramatically during the period of paid promotional posts
- The greatest traffic to the petition page came from Twitter
- Total of 298 signatures
- Letter of Support was sent officially by a number of organizations including Ducks Unlimited, Conservation Ontario, Georgian Bay Forever, Ontario Good Roads Association, Lambton Shores Phragmites Community Working Group, Central Lake Ontario Conservation
- Mike Fair also sent letter sent to the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Mayors group
- After the emergency use application was submitted by MNRF, OIPC was asked to send in one final letter of support to PMRA urging for them to approve the application
- At this point, organizations are still encouraging to continue to send this letter to their MPs, MPPs etc.

2. Update on the status of emergency use registration at Long Point and Rondeau for overwater herbicides and aerial application approvals

- An application for an emergency use registration for Roundup Custom (aquatic herbicide) for Long Point and Rondeau coastal marshes has been submitted by the MNRF to the PMRA
- Rondeau and Long Point were chosen due to the number of Species at Risk (SAR there), phragmites is mentioned in a number of SAR recovery strategies, Long Point is a World Biosphere Reserve etc. therefore, these areas are of great concern for protection
- Important to note that MNRF was the lead, but they were not the only ministry/agency apart of the application. Other organizations involved who helped with the application development include Long Point Company, Ducks Unlimited, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), NCC Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change (MOECC) (provided letter of no objection)
- Roundup Custom was chosen because it has a better environmental profile
- PMRA undertakes two main steps when an application is submitted 1. Determine if it's an actual emergency situation, and they have agreed it's an emergency 2. Undertake a risk assessment of the project, including environmental, economic and social impacts - currently completing this step
- If the application is approved, MNRF will be tasked with developing a monitoring program for water, sediment and benthos in areas of treatment; they need to develop a study protocol that is acceptable by MOECC
- Total areas to be treated is 500 hectares; 400 at Long Point, and 100 at Rondeau Bay, primarily by aerial application

- Suggested term to use regarding herbicide application near water is “wet sites” not over-water
- The MNRF expects to seek approval for BASF herbicide products in future, but for right now, Roundup Custom was chosen with support from Monsanto
- Monsanto has demonstrated they are interested in pursuing a permanent registration of this product in the future
- A communication strategy will be developed to improve receptiveness of the public re: herbicide use near water
- It was mentioned that chemical companies cannot provide communication and outreach when it comes to this issue, but they have the tools ready for us to use from them to help with our communication
- Some suggested communication avenues:
 - OGRA hosts a municipal conference with workshops; many municipal elected officials attend and Janice spoke to them last week
 - Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative in June - Janice and Nancy speaking

3. BASF (The Chemical Company) Update

- Currently completing trials for the product Imazapyr to register for phragmites use (water based, non-selective, proven non-carcinogenic)
- Has submitted a request to add phragmites to the label for Arsenal Powerline; expect to have it ready for spring
- Application has been submitted to register Habitat for control of phragmites in wet sites
- Expect 24 months until full registration for use of Habitat in wet sites; its believed you will need a special permit to apply to use this product
- Since PMRA is a federal registration, the product will be made available in all provinces including Ontario, but the province has the ability to put restriction on certain products under the Ontario Pesticides Ban

4. Roadside Control Discussion

a. Ministry of Transportation (MTO) Update – Murray Purcell

- There is a total of 16,000 km of highways in Ontario and Murray’s responsibility includes most of SW Ontario, west of Toronto; approx. 2000 km of highways
- His region is divided into three areas and he contracts out most of the work, such as winter maintenance
- All vegetation-related work is asked and paid for by MTO, including invasive species removal
- They have been controlling phragmites for several years
- Challenges: funding, overspray, public visibility and perception, not enough contractors to do the work, large stands along highways can be difficult to spray
- 2011: conducted a Wick Weeder application trial; not very successful
- Have used the Ecoblade, which is a wet blade technique which produces little drift and is good for control along medians
- MTO generally doesn’t cut more than 2 m from the shoulder
- MTO has a vegetation working group; working on BMPs for phragmites control, equipment cleaning protocols, noxious weeds etc

- Working with Pat Chow Fraser to determine phragmites distribution along highways
- Also undertaking methodology trials to determine optimal cut and spray times
- 2016: hope to spray 401 from Guelph to London; 403 - HWY 21; other major regional highways; estimated cost is \$170,000
- Disposal: leave stalks standing
- Construction projects: leave contaminated fill on site, bury, or spray prior to project start; costs of taking contaminated fill to landfill are prohibitive
- How can we get other MTO regions engaged? Murray will give us contact info for regions; will have to show them key problem areas in their region, education needed to help them understand the risks of inaction
- Heather Crewe will engage the eastern region MTO contact on the phragmites road BMP workshop in Belleville this spring

b. Bill Cridland – Norfolk County

- Started controlling phragmites in 2015 and have consulted with NCC, Janice etc. about proper control
- Have spent \$18,000 thus far
- A student will survey progress in May and then they will target touch-up areas
- Consciously make an effort to avoid spreading seeds on equipment; controlled disposal of contaminated fill

c. Kate Monk – Ausable Bay Conservation

- Contracted by Huron County to do control along roadsides
- 95% success-rate based on re-emergence the following year
- Starting to integrating phragmites control into regular road maintenance program
- Control work happens throughout the summer; touch-up as needed
- St. Clair Conservation is also doing roadsides as well as wetlands
- Phragmites isn't well established in the county, therefore this is a great opportunity to control early at low cost

d. Diane Watkins – Protect Our Water and Environmental Resources (POWER)

- Completing road mapping in Halton and Peel region
- Data can be utilized by organizations and businesses to demonstrate how bad it is in this area to leverage more funds

e. Nancy Vidler – Lambton Shores Phragmites Community Group

- The Lambton Shores Phragmites Community Group was successful in receiving funding from the Grand Bend Community Foundation in 2015 to address Phragmites upstream of Port Franks and Grand Bend. This included 3 components:
 - The creation of a two page fact sheet for controlling Phragmites in agricultural areas. It was distributed to all rural landowners in the watershed upstream of Port Franks and Grand Bend. This fact sheet is also being distributed throughout the province.
 - A roadside Phragmites survey was completed in Lambton Shores and North Middlesex.
 - Two information sessions were held for agriculture and rural property owners last summer in Grand Bend and Thedford. Speakers included Don McCabe (OFA), Ken Vegh (Town of Kingsville), Al Williamson (Williamson Farms) and Janice Gilbert.
- As a result of this project, the LSPCG was able to continue to treat all Phragmites along the Ausable River within the Lambton Shores boundary.

5. Phragmites Project Updates and Discussion

The OIPC received a \$50,000 transfer payment for 2015-2016 to complete the following:

a. **Phragmites Communication Plan – Brenda Rooney (consultant hired to complete plan)**

- Brenda has completed the first draft of the plan
- The focus of the plan is to utilize existing resources to educate target audiences i.e. already frequently visited websites, social media, news media etc.
- The strength of the plan is the diversity of the group and the ability to share information widely and often
- We will circulate the second draft to the group for review

b. **Other**

- OPWG website is being updated and major updates near completion i.e. moved to WordPress, accessibility improved, Projects on the Go form updated etc.
- Wordpress will allow Kellie to make changes to the website easier in the future
- The Road BMP is near completion; going through a final review at the MNRF – will circulate next draft to the group
- Currently finalizing a group logo and an information postcard to be used at events
- Phragmites prioritization tool completed; will be posted online in the next couple of weeks
- Three phragmites webinars completed
- Informational postcard being completed; will send in the next couple of weeks

c. **Social Media Update**

Twitter

- Followers: 299
- Tweets: 312
- Post likes: 491

Facebook

- 149 Page likes
- Total post reach: 14,246
 - Organic post reach: 6,792
 - Paid post reach: 7,454
- Total post impressions: 23,684
 - Organic post impressions: 15,794
 - Paid post impressions: 7,890
- Engaged users (total clicks): 565
- Negative feedback (post hides): 8

Content Strategy

Content was focussed around three categories:

- AWARENESS - Building awareness about Phragmites and its impacts
- CONNECTION – Networking with related groups to build partnerships, collaborate
- ACTION – Direct the interest that we generate into calls to action

Awareness

- Phragmites identification
- Photos to show scope and scale
- Wetland impacts – broad scale (specific wetlands) and fine scale (specific species and case studies)
- Updates on ongoing projects by OPWG members
- Learning opportunities including webinars, presentations, and workshops
- Stories about Phragmites across North America, including problems, projects, and successes

Connection

- Networking with other conservation and environmental advocacy organizations to build partnerships and creating opportunities to collaborate on larger projects
- Interacting with their content
- Collaborating on content or outreach campaigns
- Linking to related news articles and research

Action

- Direct social media followers to:
 - Spread the word about Phragmites to their contacts
 - Encourage their government representatives to take action on PhragmitesSign the online petition for expansion of herbicide tools for wet sites
 - Send a letter to their government representatives regarding expansion of herbicide tools for wet sites
 - Track Phragmites occurrence in PhragSpotter and/or EDDMAPS

6. OPWG 2016 Goals and Other

a. Other

- Comment about CN and CP rail and their role in invasive species; they are actually very diligent with vegetation control due to safety concerns and are aware of this issue
- Need to start providing a source of information to people of control methods that have been tried and have not worked, so others don't repeat them – could add to website
- Good key messaging: impact to safety and road destruction, impacts to loss of recreational opportunities, house values etc. - this gets people talking because it directly impacts them
- Gaps: eastern Ontario not very well represented; their focus is wild parsnip; phragmites road BMP to be held in eastern Ontario this spring; OIPC expanding to those locations; website will have a better system to input projects on the go – needs to cover outreach actions as well as control projects
- Demonstration management site being completed by Eric Cleland from MNRF at Crown Marsh

b. Things we need:

- Herbicide messaging about its safety and the need for it (use PMRA info as they test these products and approve them, their messaging is trusted, as well as OIPC BMP info)
- Before and after images, especially of pollinator habitat
- Information on website of advocates who support herbicide use
- Continue to support agriculture community, they are trusted among society and can help deliver our message
- Independent herbicide impact research, not related to a chemical company

c. A look ahead

- Improve coordination between NGO's and government
- Develop a 10-year strategic plan for the OPWG
- Encourage municipalities to support an environmental coordinator position to leverage funds for control
- Conduct a survey with the OPWG members to obtain numbers regarding money spent on control

ACTION: Kellie to start this.

- Focus on community and municipal engagement
- Create a speakers bureau of speakers who can attend events to educate others
- Focus on partnering with Natural Heritage Educators in Provincial Parks

ACTION: Kellie to send a small phragmites package to them by May.

- Target other groups associated with environmental issues to become ambassadors for this issue
- Promote becoming a member and list the membership online
- Focus on encouraging province to add it to noxious weed list once proper tools become available for control
- Develop a communication piece on proper tools to circulate to municipalities once they're approved via AMO and OGRA
- Continue to share information as much as possible with all contacts