



Whatcom Weeds

Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board 901 W. Smith Road Bellingham WA 98226
(360) 354-3990 www.co.whatcom.wa.us/publicworks/weeds

GIANT REED

Arundo donax

THREAT: Giant reed, also called giant cane, is a native of Eurasia, and was probably introduced into the U.S. in the early 1800s, for use as livestock forage and roofing material. It is also used for the reeds in woodwind instruments, and has been used as a garden ornamental and for erosion control. Giant reed has escaped cultivation and can form large stands, crowding out native vegetation. Infestations of giant reed can alter the course of water channels, impede water flow and increase the deposit of sediment. Since it generally provides little shading of in-stream habitat, water temperatures in affected streams may rise. It especially invades riparian and wetland areas, and can tolerate somewhat brackish water. Since it spreads by rhizomes and plant fragments, it can easily be spread by water, especially during floods. Giant reed is one of the fastest growing terrestrial plants, with stems growing up to 4 inches per day, under ideal conditions. Once established, giant reed can withstand long periods of drought, and the dense stands formed by this plant can become a fire hazard. Giant reed provides little food or habitat for native wildlife. Currently, giant reed is being considered by some for use in biofuel production, due to its high productivity and rapid growth. If proper precautions are not taken in such cultivation, it could lead to the further spread of this plant.

DESCRIPTION: Giant reed is a very large perennial grass that can grow over twenty feet tall. It grows in clumps and spreads by rhizomes and plant fragmentation. Giant reed in North America does not seem to currently produce viable seed. The tough stems are hollow and bamboo-like. First year stems are unbranched while second year stems have branches forming at the nodes. Leaves, which can be up to 2 feet long and 1-2 inches wide, are pale-green to blue-green, and clasp the stems. Leaves grow alternately along the stem in a single plane. The plume-like flowerhead can be up to 2 feet long, and can appear from late spring to early fall.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Giant reed can be controlled using mechanical and chemical control. Small infestations can be controlled by hand digging and pulling, but care must be taken to get all the rhizomes. Stems, roots and rhizomes should be burnt or removed from the site, to prevent any form re-rooting. Mechanical control of larger infestations is generally impractical, as rhizomes can be as deep as 10 feet and still resprout. Grazing has been used to suppress the growth of the plant. Mowing may be used in conjunction with chemical treatment. To be effective, control work must be continued, as needed, throughout several growing seasons. Contact the weed control board for chemical recommendations.



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Photos: www.forestryimages.org and www.invasive.org