



Whatcom Weeds

Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board 322 N. Commercial St. Bellingham WA 98225
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GIANT REED

Arundo donax

THREAT: Giant reed, one of the largest grasses and native probably to eastern Asia, has been grown in parts of Asia, Europe and Africa for thousands of years. It is currently on the Washington State Noxious Weed Board's Monitor List (non-regulatory). It was introduced to North America in the early 1800s, and has been used as an ornamental and for erosion control. Giant reed is a terrestrial grass that grows where the water table is high, and tolerates periodical flooding. It can withstand long periods of drought once past its first year, and can tolerate brackish water. It is found along riparian areas and ditches, and in floodplains. Giant reed can form dense stands, eliminating native plants and wildlife habitat and sometimes physically altering wetlands by trapping sediment. Giant reed is tolerant of burning and may become a fire hazard in areas where established stands have large amounts of dried vegetation. However, it does not survive in areas with prolonged and regular periods of freezing. In North America, giant reed reproduces by rhizomes and by sprouting of plant fragments. Rhizome and plant fragments can be moved by water or in contaminated soil or equipment.

DESCRIPTION: Giant reed is a tall, erect perennial grass that grows from 6 to 30 feet tall. It has thick, knotty rhizomes, allowing it to spread vegetatively. In established stands of giant reed, the roots and rhizomes can form mats up to 3 feet deep, covering several acres. The hollow stems can be up to 1.6 inches in diameter, and often branch during the second year of growth. The blue-green leaves are flat, growing up to 3 feet long and up to 3 inches wide at the base, tapering to a fine point. Leaves are arranged alternately and in a single plane on the stem. Flowers are borne in large (1-2') plume-like panicles, which are silvery cream to purplish to brown. Giant reed usually flowers between March and November, but may flower at any time. North American populations of giant reed produce little, if any, viable seed. Its variegated form is sometimes sold in nurseries.



MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Giant reed can be controlled using mechanical and chemical means. It is critical to monitor any controlled site in subsequent years to prevent reestablishment of the plant. Hand digging of small infestations can be effective if as much of the root system as possible is removed and area is monitored for regrowth. All plant and root fragments should be removed from the site. Foliar and cut-stump herbicide treatments are effective if properly timed. Contact the weed board for site-specific chemical recommendations.