



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Assateague Island
National Seashore

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Assateague Island National Seashore News Release

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National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service target invasive plant infestations on Assateague Island

Assateague Island National Seashore, Berlin, Maryland and Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, Chincoteague, Virginia – Superintendent Scott J. Bentley today announced plans for controlling *Phragmites australis* (common reed) infestations on Assateague Island. *Phragmites* has dramatically increased in abundance on Assateague Island during recent years, displacing native plant communities and reducing habitat values. The variety of *Phragmites* that occurs on the island is non-native and highly invasive. It was likely originally introduced to the area from overseas in shipping ballast materials during the 18th and 19th centuries.


After being introduced to a new area, *Phragmites* begins the process of replacing native plant communities with dense monocultures of itself. Once established, *Phragmites* quickly expands and can entirely take over large areas. At present, hundreds of acres of formerly native plant communities on Assateague Island have been invaded by dense *Phragmites* stands. Infested areas frequently experience altered hydrology and no longer serve as suitable habitat for many native fish and wildlife species.

Phragmites also grows up to 12 feet tall and in doing so can block scenic vistas and greatly increase an area's wild land fire potential.

In response to the threats from *Phragmites*, the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will begin to treat infestations on Assateague Island, beginning on August 13, 2008. Individual *Phragmites* infestations will be aerially sprayed with Habitat[®], an herbicide approved for use in aquatic habitats. Afterwards, the treated areas will naturally convert back to native vegetation during the following growing season.

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Coordinating the actual spray activities will require park and refuge staff to temporarily close certain portions of Assateague Island National Seashore and Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in order to assure public safety. Minimal disruptions are expected as treated areas can be safely entered after the herbicide has dried, which typically occurs in less than an hour. In the following weeks, the treated areas will be readily visible as the vegetation slowly dies back and turns brown.

Phragmites control activities will continue on Assateague Island during subsequent years. “As a direct result of this important management program, hundreds of *Phragmites* infested acres will soon be restored back to native plant communities and once again provide essential habitat for the island’s diverse wildlife”, noted Superintendent Bentley. For more information about this project, contact Mark Sturm at 410 641 1443 x228.

For more information on Assateague Island National Seashore, visit www.nps.gov/asis/.

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