

Invasion of the Habitat Snatchers: Committee Forms to Manage Invasive Species on Town Lands

By Joanna Cummings, Co-chair, Charlotte Conservation Commission

What are invasive plants and why are they such a big problem? Non-native invasive species are plants, animals, and other organisms either accidentally or intentionally introduced from other places. Once invasive species are established, *fishing, hunting, forestry, tourism and agriculture can all be affected.*

Due to the lack of natural controls and high reproductive ability, invasive species can quickly become widespread. Invasive plants, in particular, tend to grow faster, taller, or broader, robbing space, light and nutrients from native flora. They change not only the way an area looks but also the way it functions ecologically.

Infestations can disrupt water absorption and circulation, nutrient cycling, or even create a toxic environment. And they degrade habitat quality which can reduce the number and variety of fish and wildlife. Invasive species also pose risks to human health and safety by exacerbating allergies and potentially introducing new diseases.



**Common Reed,
*Phragmites australis***

Familiar invasive plants include Japanese honeysuckle, Garlic mustard, Norway Maple, Purple loosestrife and Common buckthorn. An invader in Charlotte's Town Farm Bay wetland called *frogbit* has been an ongoing removal project for several groups, in order to prevent wetland functions from being adversely affected. And the Charlotte Wildlife Refuge's Oversight Committee developed a plan to manage several invasive species in the park, to restore wildlife habitat and enhance scenic and recreation opportunities.

Another invasive plant that grows in wetlands, marshes and along river and lakes shores is *Common reed*. It is a tall grass topped with a large tassel or plume of tiny flowers. If left unchecked, Common reed will replace native grasses, provide poor quality habitat for insects, birds and amphibians, and will reduce fish populations due to high egg and fry mortality. It grows in many areas of town, and a notable patch of this grass can be found along the town office driveway.

In order to control the spread of invasive species like Common reed, a committee called the **Charlotte Invasives Committee (CHIC)** formed to develop a management plan for town-owned lands. One thousand dollars has been allocated in the town budget to identify and assess affected areas, and create detailed treatment and monitoring plans. Members of the committee include the Charlotte Conservation Commission, Charlotte Wildlife Refuge Oversight Committee, and the Lewis Creek Association.

There are numerous invasive species on our town lands and on private property too. However they can be controlled if an infestation is relatively new, which is the case with Common reed, or if management is consistent over several years. Although this plant is growing at several locations, the areas are small, and control is very feasible and economical if action is taken early.

The allocation of funds for invasive species control is setting an excellent precedent for long-term stewardship of town lands. We hope that citizens of Charlotte feel the same and will support the committee's efforts this year and for years to come. For more information about the CHIC committee please contact us at **charlottevtcc@gmail.com**