

A little bit of teamwork went a long way to culling two troublesome patches of invasive Phragmites last Thursday in Lambton Shores. The first effort took place at the Ipperwash Dunes & Swales Nature Reserve off East Parkway Drive and involved three key partners: the Lambton Shores Phragmites Community Group (LSPCG), Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) and Lambton Shores Nature Trails (LSNT).

Meantime, in another part of the municipality, a group representing the Lake Valley Grove/Sunnidale Phragmites sub-committee was cutting and burning the same day.

Nancy Vidler, Chair of the LSPCG, explained why the Phragmites cull and burn at the Nature Reserve was an important one to undertake early in the year. "It's such an environmentally sensitive area. And it's a small cell. If we don't get on top of it right away, then it's going to take off like wildfire. So, we really want to begin the restoration project here."

A group of 22 volunteers from the three organizations took part in what was the first coordinated community cull held in Lambton Shores. "There are so many common issues - and it's an opportunity for all of us to work together," said Vi-

dlar, who is hoping that more such projects can be organized in the future.

The goal of Thursday's cull was to prevent the Phragmites seed heads from spreading by cutting the plants, collecting them, and transporting them on tarps to an open area where they were burned. By doing it now, the hope is that the application of herbicide later in the year will be much more effective.

"Getting rid of the dead stalks makes the whole process more efficient. Otherwise, you're just wasting the herbicide," said Vidler. "We try to clear out the dead stuff, get rid of seed heads - because that's the way it spreads - and then we'll be able to more easily do the work in the summer."

Among the people who partnered in the cull last week was contractor Frank Letourneau from Dover Agri-Serve of Chatham, who donated his equipment and time. "He was able to roll the standing Phragmites that was close to the water's edge using a Centaur. You can now see the beautiful landscape!" said Vidler.

Pinery Provincial Park donated numerous pairs of snowshoes to help the volunteers get to the Phragmites stand. The group used hedge trimmers, pruning shears and their hands to attack the stubborn Phragmites.

Vidler says the coordinated effort on Thursday was a successful one. "We def-

initely made an impact getting rid of the biomass. It was challenging to control the seed heads, but Jill Crosthwaite (of the NCC) wasn't concerned about this. She felt that we would be able to control this with the herbicide application in the summer. The cutting and rolling will result in a more efficient and less costly herbicide application."

Last week's projects were just the first of many efforts this year. Among others, the LSPCG is targeting one huge area, a 200-acre site on Wood Drive. "It's a coastal meadow marsh that is provincially significant, adjacent to Kettle Point," explains Vidler. "If we don't get it under control, it will just continue to contaminate the whole shoreline."

Trying to control Phragmites is not just a one-shot deal, she says. The first application of herbicide typically kills about 85-95% of the weed, allowing the native vegetation to come back right away.

The following year involves a more targeted herbicide application against the plants that return. Vidler says the program can take three years but, even so, the invasive Phragmites may still spread.

With a lot of hard work, the Phragmites Community Group has managed to raise a significant amount of funding for the Wood Drive project. That includes money from the Great Lakes Guardian Fund (\$25,000), through the Canada-On-

tario Agreement on Great Lakes Water Quality and Ecosystem Health (another \$15,000 for Wood Drive, in addition to previous support) and another grant from NextEra Energy for \$15,000.

The LSPCG is also working in partnership with the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority (SCRCA) and were successful in getting \$28,000 from the federal government Habitat Stewardship Program Prevention Stream.

Still, Vidler says what her group - and everyone fighting Phragmites - really needs is for the Province to show its support. "There's been a lot of pressure being put on the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry to step up to the plate and take leadership on this. It would really help if this was on the noxious weed list - and it's not," she explains. "We've been gently tenacious about getting them to step forward."

As far as the next efforts in Lambton Shores, Vidler is hoping to have another event similar to the one last week. "LS Nature Trails and LS Phragmites Community Group share common interests and partners, along with the ABCA (Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority), SCRCA, NCC and private landowners, so I hope we can work together in the future," she comments.

The Phragmites fight continues.

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