

ROW Invasive Species Management FAQ

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1.) **Why are you spraying invasive species?**

Invasive species are non-native plants (or animals) that cause damage to our environment, our economy or human health. From a roads maintenance perspective, invasive species like Knotweeds can break through hard top and concrete, damaging roads and bridges and causing safety concerns when they grow very tall. From an environmental perspective, they quickly push out native species, creating dense monocultures that not only kill native plants, but also hurt habitat for animals and pollinators. By managing invasive Knotweed and *Phragmites* in the RoW the VBRC hopes to protect our roads, our drivers, and our environment.

2.) **Why are you only treating *Phragmites* and Knotweeds?**

Though other invasive species exist, the VBRC is focusing on these for two reasons:

- 1.) They exist in small enough populations that they can be effectively controlled.
 - 2.) They both can be spread by mowing, can damage hard top, and can grow tall enough to be a safety hazard.
- Native species will be avoided as much as possible during this treatment, including aggressive invasive species, such as wild grape, Virginia creeper, or poke weed.

3.) **Why are you using chemicals?**

Unfortunately, effective, non-chemical treatments of knotweed have not been found. Since knotweed can spread from pieces the size of a thumb nail, digging, disking, mowing, or cutting knotweed will spread it further. This is the reason our drivers are taught to identify and avoid knotweeds while mowing or doing shoulder work. There is currently research being done on how to treat knotweed without the use of chemicals, and we hope that there is good news soon!

Phragmites has been effectively managed by flooding, but this unfortunately can't be applied in the areas that we manage. Since no other effective management strategies exist, chemical treatment gives us the best chance of controlling these populations. *Phragmites* can also spread via mowing, and therefore leaving it untreated could endanger more property and, from an environmental view point, the wetlands in Van Buren county which are key to water quality, wildlife habitat, and flood control.

4.) **Will this impact native plants?**

When at all possible, this spray program avoids native species. The end goal of invasive species treatment is the return of healthy, diverse native populations. Healthy native communities are key to successful invasive species management, and between remnant native plants and seed banks, the re-growth of native species not only improves environmental resiliency, but also decreases management costs, as treatment areas are updated annually to ensure only current invasive populations are targeted. Aggressive native plants, such as pokeweed or virginia creeper, are not included in this maintenance program. Native species are one of our greatest allies in the fight against invasives, and therefore off target damage is avoided as much as possible!

5.) Will this impact pollinators?

Though some see knotweed as a late fall food source for pollinators, it is generally considered negative for pollinators to lack diversity in pollen collection options, and some studies have shown that the presence of knotweed can lower the visitation to native pollinator plants, further impacting their competitiveness against knotweed.

Phragmites is a wind pollinated grass, and therefore sees little interaction with pollinators. However, it has a tendency to quickly spread in wet areas, pushing out native wetland plants such as milkweeds, dogsbane, and spotted touch-me-not.

This program should not directly impact pollinators, and the hope would be that native flowering plants would increase post treatment, providing pollinators with a more diverse, native diet.

6.) What are the other options for treatment?

Unfortunately, neither *Phragmites* nor knotweed respond well to any of the non-chemical treatment options that the VBRC uses for weed management. Since both reproduce from small fragments, mowing can actually spread the problem further! Research is currently being done by a number of universities to find non-chemical methods that work, and we hope that other options become available!

7.) How does the Road Commission choose which chemicals to use?

Chemical selection is based on the state management suggestions (available at Michigan.Gov/Invasives), academic research on success rates and off target impacts, and best practices utilized by other organizations in Southwest Michigan. Though species specific herbicides are not available, herbicides selected are used and applied in a way to minimize off target damage to native species.

8.) How does the Road Commission know where invasive species are?

The CISMA has been working with the Road Commission since 2017 to map invasive species along our road ways and create a management plan, particularly for knotweed and Phragmites. Both of these species are listed on the CISMA's priority species list, as well as being restricted in the state of Michigan. The CISMA uses locations reported by VBRC workers and those listed on MSU's Midwest Invasive Species Information Network to create maps of all known patches within the county which occur within the ROW.

**Please have anyone needing more information reach out to the Van Buren Conservation District. Have them ask for Nor Serocki, CISMA Coordinator. I am still working from home, but will return their call as soon as possible.
269-657-4030**