

Ontario Phragmites Working Group Communications Strategy 2016-2017

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Executive Summary

This communications strategy has been developed to help the Ontario Phragmites Working Group (OPWG) realize its goal to facilitate effective management of invasive *Phragmites australis* (or European Common Reed, hereafter referred to as *Phragmites*) within the province. It is designed to be a living document with a number of targeted audiences and a variety of results. Goals are often general, such as partnering with other organizations and groups to increase the effectiveness of our own activities. Many are longer-term, such as developing educational tools and making them readily available online and in print. We will be supported by our partners and members as well as responsive to their needs. In fact, the first finding from a SWOT Analysis would be that our diverse membership is our greatest strength because it gives us access to everyone in the stakeholder community.

To develop this strategy we have drawn on the writer's training and 30-years' experience in communications, on numerous searches and reviews of sources such as websites that address invasive species, as well as on expert opinions and focus group discussions on specific communications topics.

The identified tactics offer options to scale the communications campaign up or down, based on the resources available. Tactics not used this year could be applied in the future as the program gains acceptance, recognition, and success. To implement the overall strategy, it would be most effective to hire a Communications Director who can work on a service contract, and a summer student who can be hired through the federal government's Canada Summer Jobs program. This is in addition to maintaining the present contract for social media services and the on-going supervision by the OPWG Coordinator. If funding cannot be put in place, however, it will be possible to implement many aspects of the strategy by working with volunteers and existing staff. Appendix I lists the various tools available for publicity purposes and is included as a reference for the type of activity that may be part of any communications campaign.

A summary of the communications campaign includes:

Building Presence on the Internet

Working with the Coordinator of the Ontario Invasive Plant Council (OIPC), the OPWG Communications Director should periodically update the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) program managers and other managers of invasive species websites with news about the growth and development of all OPWG activities, especially those that support increased monitoring and encourage community acceptance of approved containment and control methods. Increasing the number of links between websites is a quick and effective method of increasing visits to the OPWG site.

The OPWG Communications Director should begin by offering website managers access to additional materials such as fact sheets, photos, etc. Teacher's guides for junior and high school will be particularly helpful here.

The OPWG website will become an information hub for all of the group's work, including communications and research updates. For example, activities like the development of a Speaker's Bureau will find a home

here. Research results, new cleanup projects, and success stories about “stopping the spread” should also be available on the site for our partners, colleagues, and the general public.

Social Media

Social media can help attract partners, distribute educational content, promote contests, etc. Content for posting can be drawn from existing publications and from new information provided by OPWG members (as aligned with the goals and objectives of the organization and approved by the Communications Director and/or the Coordinator of the OPWG). We will continue to develop and manage the OPWG Facebook page and Twitter account, and maintain the social media presence by completing 3-5 posts for each platform per week. These posts can link to relevant news articles, published research, and other content.

Press Releases

At least 10 press releases are to be distributed within the first 6-8 months. These will be about speakers, events, field activity, and research news. There will be telephone follow-ups to the press after each release.

Speaker’s Bureau

In addition to reaching live audiences, speaking events increase media coverage. The objective is to present five special events within the first eight months. Once operational, the website Events page can offer a list of qualified speakers and their bios, as well as a draft press release, handouts, posters, etc. to event organizers and other partners.

Teacher’s Guides

We will establish a working committee of educators and an advisory group of research/field experts to develop two new teacher’s guides with various types of activities. The Teacher’s Guides will be promoted within the educational system once completed, and we can have a representative present it at the Science Teachers’ of Ontario (STAO) Conference.

Highway Billboards

We will research and negotiate a contract for an 8-months’ to 1-year billboard campaign. The content can be decided by the Communications Committee in conjunction with staff. The billboards will be promoted on social media.

Look Before You Leave

Look Before You Leave is a campaign to raise awareness about how *Phragmites* spreads through the movement of equipment and clothing from one site to another and what we should be doing to stop it. The present material will be updated and a pilot test-run to determine effectiveness of the developed materials. We will consult with the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFHA), the Ministry of Transport, and others to determine the most effective outreach methods.

We will develop additional educational materials including flyers, postcards, fact sheets, and other handouts. (Some of these are already in development.) At the end of this document we present staff needs, a list of materials for graphic design, and other tools needed to implement the strategy. We have also included a rough draft budget for discussion.

The Communications Strategy

Context

The main purpose of the Ontario Phragmites Working Group (OPWG) is to facilitate effective, efficient, and environmentally responsible management of invasive *Phragmites* in Ontario. The OPWG was formed in December 2011 by dedicated professionals concerned about the growing threat posed by *Phragmites* to biodiversity and Species At Risk (SAR), to recreation and tourism, and to infrastructure and property values. Membership in this group has subsequently grown to include representation from federal, provincial and municipal governments, First Nations, cities, Conservation Authorities, NGO's, universities, community groups, cottage associations, and private citizens. In October 2013, the OPWG officially became a sub-committee of the Ontario Invasive Plant Council (OIPC).

Phragmites is considered to be the most aggressive invasive species attacking marsh ecosystems in North America (Bains *et al.* 2009, Plant Physiology 151(4)). It is Canada's worst invasive plant (Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, 2005). This rapidly spreading plant out-competes all native vegetation including cattails (*Typha spp.*) and willows (*Salix spp.*) and can grow into massive mono-culture stands. The loss of native plant diversity and associated habitat complexity results directly in the reduction of suitable habitat for wildlife. In areas where *Phragmites* is particularly extensive, impacts have the potential for the cumulative devastation of a number of species at risk which depend upon these habitats for all or a portion of their life cycle. There are also negative impacts on tourism, local businesses, and residents or visitors due to reduced recreational access and use, blocked shoreline views, fire risks, declining property values, and plugged roadside or agricultural drainage ditches.

Invasive *Phragmites* has become so pervasive throughout southern Ontario that a large scale, well-coordinated effort is now required to achieve any meaningful results. Effective, efficient, and environmentally responsible control efforts have been hampered to date by:

- 1) the lack of appropriate herbicides to deal with wetland infestations where other options are inappropriate,
- 2) the lack of a coordinated plan to deal with *Phragmites* in roadside ditches to contain further spread,
- 3) the lack of infrastructure to enable rapid responses,
- 4) the lack of financial, logistical, and control options support for community groups trying to deal with local invasions, and
- 5) **the lack of an effective public education and awareness campaign.**

The OPWG is committed to resolving the above impediments.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Our greatest weakness is that our 100 members are spread over many miles and across many disciplines with only one staff person dedicated to provide support. All positions within the OPWG are undertaken by volunteers who try to fit the required initiatives into their already busy schedules. This puts real constraints on the group's ability to undertake the large amount of work required to attain its stated goals.

At the same time, the number and diversity of OPWG members offers a remarkable opportunity for outreach and the promotion of our key messages. For example, if only 10 of the 100 members "share" our social media posts, we will reach approximately 7,000 people with each post. Imagine if we could get the whole group to support these efforts?

The creation of new connections with whom to share resources offers a way to build on our strengths and diminish our weaknesses.

Opportunities and Threats

There are a number of new organizations committed to stopping the spread invasive species, and more websites and social media links are now coming online. We can raise the profile of *Phragmites* and the eradication campaign by being ready to offer them our communications tools as resources. Timing is important to capture this opportunity.

The fear is that our target audiences and the general public will become apathetic if we will fail to deliver, or fail to communicate our successes. We need to encourage hopes for success.

Goals

Our goals are to:

- Support the effective, efficient, and environmentally responsible remediation and control of this invasive plant throughout Ontario.
- Develop and facilitate public education, information sharing, and *Phragmites* management and control activities.
- Inform stakeholders, the media, and the public about the need for action to control invasive *Phragmites* and protect sensitive wetland habitats.

Objectives

Our objectives are to:

- Increase the public's awareness of the danger presented by *Phragmites*, and their willingness to take responsible action.
- Increase media coverage on the subject of invasive species in general, and *Phragmites* in particular.
- Increase the profile of *Phragmites* on invasive species websites, in print materials, and within programs.

- Increase the number of invasive *Phragmites* management and control projects being undertaken in Ontario.

Key Messages

Through extensive research and analysis, the following key messages have been created to guide the communications actions outlined in the strategy:

1. Invasive *Phragmites* can take over wetlands and crowd out important native plants, reducing habitat for wildlife.
2. *Phragmites* has negative impacts on our communities, including reduced shoreline access (which limits recreational activities), blocked sight lines at road intersections, and damage to roads.
3. *Phragmites* impacts property owners, cottagers, and farmers, reducing shoreline property values, creating fire hazards, and blocking drainage ditches.
4. Once established, *Phragmites* costs landowners, land managers, and municipalities significant amounts of money to control and prevent its spread, so early detection and rapid responses are important.
5. Local action by individuals, grassroots organizations, municipalities, and provincial agencies can bring this invasion under control.
6. People can get involved to help stop the spread of *Phragmites*, and they can find out how by visiting our website at www.opwg.ca and our social media at Ontario Phragmites Working Group @ontariophrag

Target Audiences

Our target groups are spread throughout the province and are very diverse. They include:

- Municipal and regional government bodies
- Resource Managers
- Cottagers and outdoor enthusiasts (campers, hikers, boaters, hunters)
- The media
- Construction and road maintenance staff
- Educators and students

Since some of the key messages are specific to certain audiences, the following chart outlines methods and tools for reaching these target groups with appropriate information as to how *Phragmites* impacts them and the actions they can take to control and prevent its spread.

TARGET AUDIENCES AND HOW WE WILL REACH THEM:

Target Groups	Internet and Social Media	Signage Tools	Public Relations	Events, Speakers, Workshops	Team-building and Partnering
Municipal/ regional governments	Website, Twitter / Facebook	Highway billboards and Look Before You Leave	Clean Equipment Protocol Workshops	Develop website linkages	Contact through our Director of Communications to share resources, etc.
Cottagers and recreational wetland users	Website, Twitter / Facebook	Highway billboards and Look Before You Leave	Magazine articles and local features		
The Media	Website, Twitter / Facebook		Press Releases, PSAs, and Bulletins	Press Releases, Event Ads Speakers	Generic stories on website and high res pictures
Construction and maintenance workers	Website, Twitter / Facebook	Highway billboards, Look Before You Leave	Clean Equipment Protocol Workshops	Teaching Units Workshops	Offer Look Before You Leave prizes (e.g. “before and after” photos)
Educators and students	Website, Twitter / Facebook		Teacher’s Guides	Competitions and Prizes	Work with Ontario Science Teachers’ Association, et al.
The Public	Facebook and website	Highway billboards	Media coverage and Roadside Control Workshops	Events, Speakers’ Bureau, eradication publicity, competitions and prizes	Educational Materials

Communications Tools and Resources

1. Creating an Online Presence: Stakeholder Websites

Stakeholder Organizations and Websites

A review of existing websites that address the issue of invasive species helps us identify specific actions that can easily be taken to raise the profile of *Phragmites* as a dangerous invasive species in Ontario and across Canada. In general, the OPWG will want to build relationships with stakeholder groups and be featured on their websites. Specifically, the OPWG Communications Director (or designated communications person) should work to increase the number of links between websites, to share information and communications tools, and to gain access to new stakeholders through new networks. Much can be accomplished by conducting what is essentially a free and efficient public relations and communications campaign through prospective or existing partners.

In addition to the groups discussed below, communications managers for the websites of the Conservation Authorities, the Association of Road Superintendents, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, the Ontario Recreational Facilities Association, the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, et al. should be contacted to include our information.

Invading Species Awareness Program (ISAP)

www.invadingspecies.com

The ISAP's website has the highest Google rating. There are 100 participating partners ranging from the OPWG and government bodies, to recreational groups and cottage associations, to scientists and educators.

The site offers curriculum kits or teacher's guides for grades 4 and 6. This provides an opportunity for OPWG to raise its presence on the site when we develop curriculum materials relating to invasive *Phragmites* for older grades. We will invite sharing of the teacher's guides and cross-promotion of the resources to the educational sector.

ACTION: Address the issue that the OPWG is not included as a source in their "Further Information" go-to list. Offer their website manager access to additional materials such as fact sheets, photos, etc. and update the Ontario ISAP about resources on the OPWG website as they become available. Increasing the number of links between websites is a quick and effective method of increasing visits to the OPWG site. Teacher's guides for junior and high school will be particularly helpful here.

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF)

www.ontario.ca/ministry-natural-resources-and-forestry

The MNRF has website sections on what invasive species are, why they are destructive, and how the government is addressing the threat. The vital document, *The Ontario Invasive Species Strategic Plan* (developed in 2012), is housed here. However, the OPWG website is not included in the right-hand box on the MNRF homepage listing of recommended sites for further information and action.

There are opportunities to build an OPWG presence on this site. For example, one of the main goals of the MNRF communications plan is to increase monitoring of invasive species. Promoting the EDDMapS Ontario monitoring tool/activity to educators, cottagers, and recreational users of our waterways will be a useful way to develop links with the MNRF site.

ACTION: Work with the Coordinator of the OIPC to periodically update the MNRF program managers and Communications Services Branch about the development and expansion of all OPWG materials and activities, especially those that support increased monitoring and community acceptance of approved containment and control methods. This will increase the profile of OPWG and *Phragmites* on the MNRF website.

Approach the InvasionON Communications Services¹ to see if they will cooperate with us by posting our press releases on their media service. This would save money and extend reach without duplicating effort.

Invasive Species Centre (ISC)

www.invasivespeciescentre.ca

The Invasive Species Centre was founded by the Government of Ontario and four federal government departments including Natural Resources Canada, the Canadian Forest Service, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Information contained on this site is more general, offering a paragraph on each invasive species and a fact sheet. Invasive species are categorized under four headings, one of which is Plants, and the paragraph on *Phragmites* is the fourth of seven plants covered in this section. EDRR Ontario is one of four “family websites” included on the homepage banner². EDRR Ontario is a mapping/tracking project that the OPWG (under its umbrella organization, the OIPC) can connect with and support as part of its goal to increase monitoring of the distribution of invasive *Phragmites*.

ACTION: Work with the OIPC to support a stronger presence at the Invasive Species Centre. Develop links between our OPWG website, educational materials, etc. to the EDRR Ontario project.

Conservation Ontario (CO)

www.conservation-ontario.on.ca

Conservation Ontario is a not-for-profit organization representing 36 Conservation Authorities. This organization can serve as an efficient gateway for the OPWG to access the entire provincial network of Conservation Authorities. This would facilitate the distribution of information and resources to potential partners for *Phragmites* control and eradication. For example, the distribution of publicity materials for the *Look Before You Leave* Campaign could be extended to every conservation area in the province through one simple connection.

¹ *Not sure what this is?*

² *Not sure if this is correct – I did not see it there.*

ACTION: Work on building an ongoing working relationship of mutual support. CO would be a great place to feature information and activities about *Phragmites*, to help promote our events and the Speaker's Bureau, and to distribute our campaign materials, etc.

Canadian Council on Invasive Species (CCIS)

www.canadainvasives.ca

The Canadian Council on Invasive Species is a national organization that works collaboratively across jurisdictional boundaries to support action and information for reducing the threat and impact of invasive species. One of their primary targets is to build a national spotters' network. The OIPC sits on the board of the CCIS. However, the CCIS is still a young organization. There is very little information on *Phragmites* on their website, and – at this time – only one fact sheet about invasive plants (about Giant Hogweed).

ACTION: Work with the CCIS to have photos of *Phragmites* included in the banner and elsewhere on the site. Provide them with *Phragmites* fact sheets and other useful materials such as the flyer, etc. Encourage them to link to our website, especially to our media and resources sections. Continue to work as a partner with the National Spotters Network, particularly in supporting the EDRR mapping initiative, which can be promoted as part of the Teacher's Guides and campaigns like *Look Before You Leave*.

Great Lakes Phragmites Collaborative (GLPC)

www.greatlakesphragmites.net

The Great Lakes Phragmites Collaborative is a regional partnership established to improve communication and collaboration and lead to more coordinated, efficient, and strategic approaches to non-native *Phragmites* management, restoration, and research across the Great Lakes basin in both the United States and Canada. The GLPC communicates via an interactive website, a webinar series, and social media outlets to facilitate access to information and resources and encourage technology transfer and network building among habitat managers, governmental agencies, and private landowners. Webinars developed by the OPWG could be linked and promoted through this site. Co-Chair Janice Gilbert is a member of the GLPC advisory council and has been developing links between OPWG and the Collaborative. The Communications Director can support her work and the OPWG will benefit with greater traffic to its website.

ACTION: Work to build a partnership with the GLPC through such projects as the training webinar for shooting video in the field with mobile phones and stills cameras. Any webinars that we create and post on YouTube could be linked or posted on their site, which will help increase traffic to the OPWG website.

2. The Ontario Phragmites Working Group Website

Under the banner of the Ontario Invasive Plants Council, the OPWG website at www.opwg.ca has recently been refreshed and updated. In the future, it will have pull-down menus with sections for Educators and Media. For educators, we plan to develop materials that will highlight the effects of *Phragmites* and how we can take action, including mapping its spread, participating in clean-ups, encouraging people to clean off their recreational vehicles, etc. For both educators and media, there will be access to photos and re-usable content, including stories of 250, 500, 750 and 1,000 words' length. (Some of these already exist and others

will be developed.) In addition, we will post press releases, high-resolution photos, video links, etc. for external retrieval by the public.

It is important for the OPWG website to be updated and maintained regularly for it to become the information hub for all the work of the OPWG (including both research and communications). For example, activities like the development of the Speaker's Bureau will be housed here. Also, research results, new *Phragmites* management and control projects, and success stories about stemming the spread should be available on the website for our partners, colleagues, and the general public.

ACTION: Make the website the hub of all communications for the OPWG, including photos, stories, communications materials, projects, and publicity. Set up links to our friends and partners to extend our reach. Facebook and Twitter posts will send viewers back to the site.

3. Social Media

OPWG has a social media expert on contract. She will continue the campaign to build friends on our Facebook and Twitter pages: Ontario Phragmites Working Group/ @ontariophrag. (See the sample strategy in Appendix II.)

ACTION: Undertake the following actions immediately:

- Encourage all of the partner organizations and others to “like” the Facebook page and to share our posts on their own Facebook pages. Our goal in the first 6 months will be to reach 500 new friends from our current 130 (approx.).
- Create and distribute a short fact sheet on how to maximize the power of social media, and how “sharing” posts can increase distribution and reach. We will ask our members, representing about 100 groups and organizations, to share our posts regularly and to have their social media and/or website managers to do so as well.
- Ensure that social media links are included in all of our print materials and have a high profile on our website.
- Develop additional graphics, such as banners which can be used in different seasons or to promote new campaigns.
- Provide a budget for boosting posts to wider audiences. For an investment of as little as \$12, a Facebook post can be boosted to all of the friends of our Facebook friends, to a designated geographic area, or to people with specific interests such as hunting, fishing, and other recreational activities.

Undertake the following actions within six months:

Once the Facebook page has built up its following to a substantial number, we will launch a competition to submit photos and win prizes such as tote bags or mugs. Contact Canadian Geographic, Nature Magazine, and other publications for partnership in the competition and ask them to publish the photos of our

winners in their magazines. The OPWG would retain the right to use and publish all the photos submitted. This will generate a library of photos for use alongside our other profile-building activities.

Over time, other competitions could be run, such as participation in mapping activities and classroom projects, etc. The purpose of these projects would be to increase our knowledge and grow our active network through engagement on social media.

Goal: Build to 500 followers on Facebook and 5 to 10 partners who regularly share posts.

4. Media Campaign, Press Releases, and Other Media Materials

Press releases will be developed to interest the media in stories and announcements about events and speakers, group meetings, identification and mapping activities, and restoration projects. Media relations will be most active during the periods of field activity (September, January through March, and July-August), but the development of a Speaker's Bureau will provide "time hooks" for the media to cover the story in the fall and early winter season. All press releases will be followed-up by phone to ensure that the journalists are aware of the content of the release and to offer additional information. Through direct contact, we will build relationships with the media. This will allow us to maintain an up-to-date media list as journalists are re-assigned or move to new placements. In addition to press releases, public service radio announcements and bulletins will be sent out in support of activities in the field. Such activities would include community meetings, speakers, eradication initiatives, and public awareness campaigns.

The website will support these communications with a media toolkit for use by partners and media. As mentioned above, materials will include generic press releases, poster or flyer templates with fillable information sections, stories and bulletins, fact sheets, links to videos, and high-res photos.

Goal: Distribute at least 10 press releases within the first six to eight months.

Regional media, community radio, and weekly newspapers will be eager to cover local stories. Restoration projects, events, and speakers in their area will be of prime interest to their audiences. Local partners will have the most up-to-date and extensive information about local media and about community listservs or "Yahoo Groups" links, etc. With support from our Communications Director and access to our website materials, local partners can take the lead in establishing contact with their regional media, thus freeing up the time of the Communications Director for other work.

Urban and province-wide media outlets will be more interested in the larger issues and broader campaigns. Activities such as the launch of a new provincial mapping initiative, reports of research results, or the development of new control techniques will be of interest to them. The OPWG will provide high-resolution stills, video clips, and other materials to support these stories. The press releases developed for these stories will be included in the Media section of the OPWG website and available to all. The existing media list, based on a compilation of member lists and additional research, will be maintained with on-going outreach. Consideration will be given to using the Canadian Press Newswire service or other distribution services wherever the subject matter warrants a financial investment to increase our normal reach.

Recreational magazines and media such as Cottage Life, Hunting Life, Out of Doors, and Angler and Hunter TV (in its fifth season) offer opportunities to develop feature stories about the larger issues around invasive species and breakthroughs in research and management. Getting stories featured in these publications or broadcasts will require dedicated work and support. We are developing stories of different lengths to post on the website, and in some instances editors may use them in their newsletters. Direct contact with editors to discuss potential stories increases the success rate for publishing press releases and other materials sent to them. Magazines and newsletters reach one of our most important target groups – cottagers and outdoor enthusiasts – and they are well worth the investment of time and energy required to get a story published. These stories are also the source of information for many smaller media outlets, such as local papers where the journalists may not have the luxury of time to develop each piece on their own.

ACTION: Discuss possible story ideas with each targeted magazine or newsletter editor. Submit press releases and sample stories for potential reprinting.

Value-added distribution

An effort needs to be made to develop in-depth coverage that can have an impact on a larger scale. Regional CBC producers and the daily papers will often pick up stories from magazines and other media, so there is value added from the time invested. One example of how a story was picked up and reprinted by additional media is the feature-length article on Janice Gilbert’s work against *Phragmites* that was published last fall in MorelMag by Mary Baxter (morelmag.ca/article/taking-mighty-phragmites-australis). This story and its associated publicity generated articles in the Lake Erie Beacon and the St. Thomas Times Journal.

Sister organizations and media will often pick up on stories and promote them to their own networks. Stories shared on social media often just use the content directly from a public service announcement or bulletin. Web masters and managers in most organizations can be asked to link to and share stories already in the media. These networks are a powerful way to extend the reach of our media coverage.

5. List of Speakers and Special Events

Building public awareness through special events is an effective and inexpensive education and communications technique. An event generates local interest and provides content for social media, and it provides a reason to send out media releases, distribute postcards and flyers, and receive media coverage. By having a list of speakers available to enhance their events, we support our partners and community groups as they spearhead their own regional activities.

The OPWG will create a list of speakers with expertise whose messages are compatible with its policies, thus ensuring that consistent information is given to the public. This list of teachers, researchers, workers-in-the-field, policy advisors, and community organizers will be posted on our website and promoted to our members, partners, educators, and stakeholder associations. The list will identify speakers with short bios and photos, as well as by region and area of expertise. We will work with all partners to incorporate their suggestions into the list of speakers.

The OPWG can help event organizers publicize their events with a package containing digital versions of generic posters, flyers, and background sheets which will be developed and approved. In addition, handout materials (such as the postcards, etc.) can be made available for distribution at their events.

ACTION: Promote the list of speakers by posting announcements on the OPWG website, distributing press releases, and sharing news on social media. Periodic announcements of new speakers or up-coming events will refresh interest in and use of the list. Photos of events that take place can be used to enliven Facebook postings and newsletters.

Goal: Support partner organizations in hosting five special events such as public awareness sessions and speaking engagements within the first eight months.

6. Teacher's Guides and Lesson Packages:

The power of education to change society is readily demonstrated through the development and growth of the blue-box recycling program. It started with children coming home from school and telling their parents that they didn't want to have packaging waste in their lunches: "No more plastic wrap, please." They told their parents about recycling juice boxes and which kinds would be good to use. It wasn't long before the children had educated them and the parents began to recycle seriously. The learning process was initiated by teachers in the classroom.

There are a number of points where learning about invasive species in general and *Phragmites* in particular can be matched up with the Ontario Public School curriculum. By providing innovative and tested teaching materials for educators, we can bring *Phragmites* into the classroom and reach a whole new generation. The OPWG has a standing committee of educators who are currently developing ideas for lesson plan content. Learning materials will include fact sheets, cards, posters, curriculum-linked activities for the classroom and outdoors, a version of *Look Before You Leave*, DVDs, etc. There can also be some classroom rewards for participating in the learning projects, perhaps for "best decorated classroom" or "most identified locations for mapping", and so on.

We will develop a series of hands-on lesson packages designed to fulfill these active learning streams in the school curriculum.

Education Level	Curriculum Stream
Elementary	The world around us and our communities. (There is already a very good teacher's guide available on the <i>Ontario Invading Species</i> website. We would want to support it and add a section on <i>Phragmites</i> .)
Grade 9	Academic stream: Sustainable Ecosystems Applied stream: Sustainable Ecosystems and Human Activity
Grade 11	Diversity of Living Things
College Biology	Plants in the Natural Environment (Human Interaction)

Distribution and promotion of the lesson packages can occur through:

- the OPWG website;
- a press release and articles sent to educators' magazines such as the Canadian Teacher's Magazine, YES! Magazine.org, Professionally Speaking from the Ontario College of Teachers, Education Week, Education Magazine, and Green Teacher.com;
- co-operation with MNRF, the Ministry of Education, and the Council on Invasive Species;
- science consultants across the province;
- the Ontario Science Teachers' Association Conference, by a post on their blog at <https://stao.ca/res2/resources.php> (and perhaps by having them include information on their website).

ACTION: Establish a working committee of educators and an advisory group of research and field experts to develop three new teacher's guides with multiple types of activities. Convene the groups and establish timelines.

Goal: Develop two teacher's guides that both result in three classroom-activity uses within the first year.

7. Signage

Banners and Signs

Cloth banners or other signage may be useful for providing information to the local community, passersby, or recreational users at sites where *Phragmites* work is going on. (However, these would not have the same priority as the billboard campaign.)

Highway Billboards

Working 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, rain or shine, billboards provide opportunities that are unmatched by other methods of traditional advertising. They are particularly effective for attracting the attention of cottagers and outdoor enthusiasts when positioned on the highways used to reach cottage country and recreational areas and seen on a regular basis. A very strong advertising medium on their own, billboards are also often used in conjunction with print, television, radio, or online media, to provide visual reinforcement of a message. In short, they are a cost-effective way to produce results.

Billboards are rented by the month on yearly contracts. Some research will need to be done to determine in which regions and on which highways billboards would be most effective for the OPWG. The billboard graphics would display the new OPWG logo and reflect the same branding as our website, Facebook pages, and print materials.

Three of the best known suppliers are Impact Marketing (the largest with 350 signs), followed by Stellar Outdoor Advertising, and the much smaller Vision Outdoor Marketing. Supplier contact information is included in Appendix III.

ACTION: Check with partners, particularly the ISAP, to request that they share experience working with outdoor signage companies. Contact each company and discuss potential support for the OPWG as a not-for-profit organization working to protect the environment. Research traffic patterns to determine which locations offer the best combination of potential audience reach and cost. Ask the company for a discount and offer in return a photo contest on social media, for example, a photo of the billboard in situ and a description to be posted on Facebook. Give out prizes for best billboard photo.

8. The *Look Before You Leave* Campaign

This campaign is broadly focused on all invasive species, encouraging cottagers, recreational users, and Ministry of Transportation road crews to check their equipment, boats, and vehicles for plant material or debris that might hold seeds from invasive species before leaving one area to go to another. For the purposes of the OPWG, the campaign needs to be revamped and updated. The OPWG will bring together a committee drawn from its members to evaluate existing materials and guide the development of a program focused on *Phragmites*.

Methods to reach the various target groups will vary. For example, the Ontario Good Roads Association training programs could have a unit on *Phragmites* and how to stop it from spreading. It would include information on how to dispose of vegetation when working on ditches and how to clean equipment and work boots before moving from one site to another, and could emphasize the importance of tracking the spread using the EDDR mapping system.

Road crews can be targeted through the Ministry of Transport and the Association of Road Superintendents. Cottagers can be reached through cottage associations and roadside signage. Recreational users can be reached through Conservation and Recreation Authorities, through activity-specific groups such as the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, and through magazines associated with their recreational interest.

Weekend campaigns could be set up at locations, such as Conservation Areas and parks, where volunteer teams would hold “roadside control” events, cleaning cars and boots before visitors leave, handing out fact sheets and flyers, and generally raising user awareness through the activity. This may take up to two years to organize, but would draw a large amount of public notice.

Because of the importance of this campaign for stopping the spread of *Phragmites*, we recommend a pilot project to test the re-developed materials before province-wide distribution.

Materials to support the campaign will include:

- Educational units based on the Clean Equipment Protocol. These need to be developed and tested for their effectiveness in training road crews (or other Ministry of Transport employees).
- Flyers, which will be vital for disseminating information about the campaign. They can be circulated digitally or printed. Print distribution might include outlets selling hunting and fishing licenses or perhaps gas stations (of which there are just under 500 in Ontario). Road crews can be reached

through the Ministry of Transport, with flyers posted in crew offices and garages. Flyers will be included in the teacher's guides, on Facebook, and distributed in Conservation Areas and parks.

- A press release and follow-up callout to announce the launch of the campaign. Spokespeople would be available to respond to media questions.
- Public service announcements for radio play
- Facebook and Twitter posts
- Website support

ACTION:

1. Establish a working group of OPWG members with expertise in the area of road maintenance and get feedback on the present *Look Before You Leave* materials available. Develop new materials using best practices and lessons learned.
2. Work with the OFHA and others to determine the most effective mechanism to reach cottagers and other recreational users of wetlands and waterways. (For example, would posting flyers at hunting and fishing license outlets, gas stations, or some other location be best?)
3. Test the effectiveness of the developed tools before their distribution.

Goal: Revamp the *Look Before You Leave* campaign by targeting road crews, cottagers, and recreational users of wetlands and waterways. Establish outreach activities with provincial organizations such as the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, the Ontario Recreational Facilities Association, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, the Ministry of Transport, the Ontario Good Roads Association, and the Association of Road Superintendents.

9. Video Training

Video postings on Facebook and websites are common today and they grab the attention of viewers, so it is important to build a library of videos and stills photos. Every mobile phone has the capacity to create a video. Stills cameras can do both high-resolution stills for use in print and high-definition video. There can be challenges in using these recording devices, but these can be addressed through training and planning.

ACTION: Prepare a webinar through which trainers will explain how to maximize the use of recording equipment and plan what type of shots are needed to tell a story, etc. Examples are to be given to illustrate the points made, and there will be a Q&A session after the presentation. The webinar session will be recorded and posted on YouTube and linked to the OPWG website and Facebook page.

Goal: Present the webinar in the early summer.

10. Graphics and other Materials to Be Developed

Graphics Design:

- Social media: banners for Facebook, an icon for use on printed materials, plus additional images as needed
- Billboard signs
- Postcards: as developed, with at least two more postcards
- Flyers: generic (e.g. for a speaker's event, with a white-space box for customization), *Look Before You Leave*, individual flyers like the fact sheets, etc.
- Stories: graphic layout for stories of different lengths

Postcard features:

- A series of four, each with different short messages, e.g. the "Worst Invasive Plant" card and the gardener's *Phragmites* and *Miscanthus* (2 of 4 still to be done)
- Cards to include Facebook, website, and twitter accounts
- Backsides to include relevant quotes or useful facts

Distribution of printed versions of the postcards will be to all members and partners of the OPWG and the OIPC for redistribution, to conservation zones and park sites for display in areas of public access, as handouts at public events, and as a set for use in classrooms, or as part of a prize or gift.

Electronic versions of the postcards will be downloadable from the website (under Resources) for use by teachers, community organizers, and others. They can be posted on Facebook and sent to outdoor recreation magazines along with background notes and a press release.

Prizes, Gifts, and Swag

We are looking at organic tote bags, cups, postcards, and other items to be used as prizes and gifts- A set of the four postcards in an attractive envelope could be a gift to classroom groups who are following one of the study guides. The tote bags could be used as a thank-you to guests and special volunteers, or as prizes for best photo, the most number of mapping sites, etc., or as an incentive for Facebook activities and publicity campaigns.

Bookmarks, posters, and maps could be included along with the postcards as part of the teacher's guides. A benefit of these educational gifts would be that the OPWG would be able to track the effectiveness of the teacher's guides, who is using them, and so on.

Staff

Communications Director

The Communications Director will serve as the point-person for media interactions that promote and enhance the organization's operations. Working with the OPWG team, he or she will implement the Communications Strategy, assist in creating the educational materials, and update and maintain the OPWG media list. These activities will require the expertise for working independently to:

- Implement an integrated, organization-wide strategic communications plan to broaden awareness of the strategies for containing and eradicating of *Phragmites* across key stakeholder audiences.
- Build a brand/marketing/public relations campaign that will enable external audiences, including the media, public officials, and key influencers to understand and support the work of the OPWG.
- Identify challenges and emerging issues faced by the sector and organization, and work with the members and staff to recognize internal and external communications opportunities and solutions, and define and execute the appropriate strategies to support them.
- Actively cultivate and manage press relationships to ensure coverage of issues of strategic importance to organization, including special events, public announcements, and other projects.
- Oversee, or execute as needed, all print and electronic copy intended for public consumption while ensuring its alignment with the strategic communications plan.
- Oversee, or execute as needed, the development of all print and branded materials.
- Oversee, or execute as needed, the development of social media communications and the OPWG's website to maintain content and increase audience engagement with OPWG social media channels.
- Exercise judgment to prioritize media opportunities, and prepare talking points, speeches, presentations, and other supporting material as needed.

Qualifications:

- ✓ 5+ years' experience in a communications role
- ✓ Experience managing and executing across several communications media
- ✓ Strong written communication skills, required
- ✓ Willing to work independently in executing day-to-day tasks
- ✓ Capable leader, manager, and coach for volunteer talent
- ✓ Ability to prioritize and follow through effectively

Summer Student

The Summer Student will assist the Communications Director in implementing the strategy, collecting data, pictures, and stories from the field, distributing the educational materials, and other tasks as requested. Preferred candidates will have an interest in science, the environment, and communications.

Budget

Communications Director	30 wks x \$30 x 15hrs	13,500.00
Social Media Manager	48 wks x \$20 x 4 hrs	3,840.00
Graphic Designer	65 hrs x \$40	2,600.00
Billboard design and print		1,600.00
Webmaster	66 hrs x \$30	1,980.00
Printing		
flyers, posters, brochures, other		2,500.00
Ads		
billboards	4 signs x 12 mths x \$300	14,400.00
magazines	4 ins. x 4 outlets	2,000.00
Facebook boosts	over 48 wks	720.00
Event ads in local papers	10 events x 2 ins. X \$250	5,000.00
Swag		1,500.00
Hospitality, travel, courier		2,000.00
		Total
		<u>\$51,640.00</u>

Appendix I

Publicity Tools

This list is intended for use as a prompt or reminder of the many publicity tools available. It is included here as a resource to support the on-going development of the communications strategy. Each has its strengths and weaknesses when applied within different scenarios. Some tools are more useful in small communities, schools, or other organizations and others will reach across the country.

Posters – Posters large and small announcing events can be printed and emailed. They announce what, when, where, and how much. A well-known marketing study found that with poster media you have two seconds to capture viewers' attention.

Flyers – Small versions of posters, they can also be inserted in tote bags, in displays, and on counters where they may be picked up. They are beneficial in that they can contain more information than posters and can even be printed and cut four-to-a-page, saving on costs.

Community Calendar Announcement - A brief description (who, what, when, where, and perhaps why) of a community need or activity, included in a radio or television "community calendar". Before sending it to the radio station make sure you read it out loud and time it. It should not be more than 60 seconds long and should be easy to read, as most announcers will not have the opportunity to practice it beforehand.

Event Listing - A brief description (who, what, when, where, and perhaps why) of a community event or need listed free in a special section of newspapers and magazines. There are often deadlines that must be met to guarantee inclusion.

Donated Ad - Advertising time or space paid for by a sponsor, including a regular advertiser in that medium, a corporate sponsor, or a community business. A donated ad, paid for by several sponsors, may include a box at the bottom identifying the business donors.

Feature - A story that gives detailed information on an issue, a trend, a situation, an industry, a company or organization, or individual. A feature often focuses on the human element. It is designed to enlighten, entertain, and/or educate readers. Ideas for features can be pitched to various media.

Guest Editorial - An analysis of or commentary on news events or public concerns, written by someone whose credibility is based on his or her knowledge of a particular subject and/or position in an organization.

Letter to the Editor - A letter written for and sent to a newspaper or magazine to present an organization's position, make a correction, or respond to another story or letter.

Press Release - A press release can be distributed on paper, on disk, by email, by a PR newswire, or posted on a website. A press release is flagged with the phrase "For Immediate Release" in large type near the top of the page. The press release announces information about an event you hope the media will cover. It should be concise, but may include quotes from those involved.

Promotional "prop" or symbol - Inexpensive yet interesting and relevant items sent with "soft" publicity materials to attract media attention and perhaps serve as props within visual media, particularly television.

Publicity Photos - Photographs taken for publicity purposes and submitted, with a cutline, to the print media. Photos may be accompanied by a news release, fact sheet, or other publicity material.

Public Service Announcement (PSA) - A broadcast announcement for which no charge is made which promotes the programs, activities, or services of a federal, provincial, or municipal governments, non-profit organizations, or other groups serving community interests. Information for PSAs can be prepared in point form, as a script, or pre-recorded on tape. All are submitted to the PSA director. Some broadcasters will also accept PSAs in video form.

Signage – Large signs which draw the attention of passersby, sandwich boards, and displays are very useful for building a presence in a community or environment. They are portable and re-usable, and can be designed to be weatherproof and easily stored by using paint on fabric, for example. (These simple, low-cost tools are often undervalued, in my estimation.)

Internet – You can use networking groups or access other groups through their email lists. Many communities now have listservs for community events. Individuals also have large contact lists and can use them to do outreach with flyers, letters, and other information. This is a very effective medium.

Websites – Websites can be effective tools for the exchange of ideas, for marketing, for outreach. They require regular up-keep. Links can be emailed, imbedded within content, or offered in other website listings. Check out www.wakefieldfilmfestival.ca or www.theatrewakefield.ca as examples.

Social Media – Blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn all have their uses for outreach – they can also be energy drains with little return. Make sure beforehand that your target audiences actually use them and that you can quantify the results of activity on these media.

Facebook now provides groups with statistics on their page's reach. You need to encourage people to "like" your group and to "like" your posts so that each one you put up goes to multiple Facebook sites (use giveaways, responses, or other tracking techniques).

Blogs are something you can do yourself, or you can find others who maintain blogs and get them to cover your project, since many bloggers have quite large followings. Either approach will work for immediate online distribution of news and opinion.

Twitter can be a good tool for building a following or for gaining influence. The most successful Twitter posters are in the media already or have some on-going promotional means... politicians, journalists, et al. Sometimes you can generate a following among influential people (as happened with Peggy Edwards whose followers now include politicians focused on senior's issues). Effective Twitter posts require some skill in writing concisely and for impact.

2016 Invasive Species Awareness Week Social Media Schedule

21 February – 27 February 2016

Appendix II

Social Media for Awareness Week

Purpose: To expand invasive species outreach and awareness across Ontario during the upcoming 2016 Invasive Species Awareness Week (ISAW) by having a coordinated group of organizations promoting related social media content.

Background: To help maximize our outreach potential during the upcoming ISAW (Feb. 21-27), we are inviting all interested organizations to help spread the message of invasive species awareness. As Ontario and Canada do not have a formally recognized “Invasive Species Awareness Week”, our objective is to build on the efforts and successes of the *National Invasive Species Awareness Week* (www.nisaw.org) campaign from the US. NISAW has been a very effective tool for increasing awareness of invasive species. We hope that by providing you with a list of organizations and profiles that will be posting for ISAW, all organizations will benefit by increasing efficiency and minimizing duplication.

Our Request: We kindly ask that your organization’s social media moderator support this initiative by *sharing, liking, and reposting* our ISAW social media content to your own pages and accounts. In doing so, we hope that all participating organizations benefit by introducing their efforts and resources to new audiences. If your organization has any ISAW posts planned, especially any related to the daily themes below, please use the #InvasiveSpeciesWeek and we would be happy to share your content within our networks.

DATE	Mon. 22 Feb. 2016	Tues. 23 Feb. 2016	Wed. 24 Feb. 2016	Thurs. 25 Feb. 2016	Fri. 26 Feb. 2016
DAILY THEME	<i>Pathways, Prevention & Reporting</i>	<i>Early Detection & Rapid Response</i>	<i>Tools for Invasive Species Action</i>	<i>Invasive Species in the Garden</i>	<i>Kids Day</i>

How to find related content:

1. Visit the social media accounts listed below
2. Follow along on Twitter using the hashtag **#InvasiveSpeciesWeek**



2016 Invasive Species Awareness Week Social Media Schedule
21 February – 27 February 2016

Social Media Accounts To Watch:

Organization	Twitter Handle	Facebook Page
Invading Species Awareness Program (ISAP)	@invspecies	www.facebook.com/invspecies
Ontario Invasive Plant Council (OIPC)	@OIPC1	www.facebook.com/ontarioinvasiveplantcouncil
Invasive Species Centre (ISC)	@InvSp	www.facebook.com/invasivespeciescentre
Forests Ontario (FO)	@Forests_Ontario	https://www.facebook.com/Forests.Ontario/
Early Detection & Rapid Response Network (EDRR)	@EDRRNetOn	N/A
Forest Invasives (FI)	@ForestInvasives	N/A
Asian Carp Canada (ACC)	@asiancarpca	www.facebook.com/asiancarpca



Appendix III

Billboard Sign Company Contact Information

Impact Marketing and Muskoka Outdoor Advertising

215 Allison's Point Road

Huntsville, ON P1H 1B5

Huntsville: 705-789-5300

Toll Free: 866-591-7446

Fax: 866-591-7444

Sales Team: sales@ImpactMktg.ca

Inquiries: info@ImpactMktg.ca

Stellar Outdoor Advertising

620 Wilson Ave, Suite 503

Toronto, Ontario

M3K 1Z3

Phone: 800-268-0099

Email: info@stellaroutdoor

Vision Outdoor Advertising

Box 1600,

Bracebridge, On, P1L 1V6

705 706 1000

VisionOutdoor.com