

Invasive Phragmites Control at Long Point Region and Rondeau Provincial Park

Implementation Plan - 2020

Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry
Fish and Wildlife Policy Branch, Biodiversity and Invasive Species Section
Southern Region, Aylmer District

Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks
Ontario Parks, Southwest Zone

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1.0 Background Information

1.1 Phragmites and the 2020 Pilot Control Project

European Common Reed, (*Phragmites australis* (Cav.) Trin. Ex Steud) *Phragmites* is an invasive perennial grass that was transported from Eurasia and is causing severe degradation to coastal wetlands and beaches in North America. In 2005, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada identified it as the nation's "worst" invasive plant species.

Once established in an area, *Phragmites* can rapidly form extensive monocultures that displace native plant and animal species, decreasing biodiversity, and threatening the habitats of numerous provincially and federally-listed Species at Risk.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (‘the ministry’) and the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks have recognized *Phragmites* as a significant threat to biodiversity and Species at Risk at Long Point and Rondeau coastal marshes. Prior to 2016, the ministry worked with several partners in an attempt to eradicate invasive *Phragmites* from these locations. Efforts were unsuccessful in controlling the spread of *Phragmites*, primarily due to the lack of a registered herbicide for use in Canada in wet areas.

To address the continued and exponential growth of *Phragmites* in wet areas in Rondeau Provincial Park and the Long Point region (includes Long Point, Turkey Point and lower Big Creek Watershed), the ministry has been approved by Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency for an Emergency Registration as a pilot project to allow for ground application of an herbicide (active ingredient glyphosate) in wet areas. In 2016 and 2017, aerial herbicide application by helicopter was the primary method of application to access the remote and sensitive terrain at the majority of sites at Rondeau and Long Point.

Due to successful treatments in 2016 and 2017, the focus of the pilot program in 2018 and 2019 was on follow-up ground herbicide applications to address regrowth, and small populations that have not yet been treated. Ground application is better suited to address low density *Phragmites* stands.

In 2020, the ministry has been approved by the Pest Management Regulatory Agency to continue the pilot project at Rondeau Provincial Park and the Long Point region.

Implementation of this year's pilot project is scheduled to occur between August 15 and October 31, 2020, with a continuing focus on retreatments and ground applications as necessary.

2.0 Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of this project is to control invasive Phragmites in Rondeau Provincial Park and the Long Point Region in order to reduce or remove the threat to the biodiversity and ecological integrity of these areas. The tools and techniques used will be applied based on best available information, which are summarized within the document *Invasive Phragmites – Best Management Practices* (MNRF 2011) and based on the experience of project staff from the ministry, Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks and the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

The initiation and continuation of this pilot project at Rondeau and Long Point is based on the presence of significant natural values and the observed exponential growth of Phragmites in these coastal marshes – if left unchecked. Local biologists and scientists advised that the health of these coastal marshes is at a critical tipping point. If action is not taken to control Phragmites, the provincial, national and global significant values for which these areas are recognized will be permanently lost. Due to the aggressive nature of the invasive plant, if efforts to eradicate are not continued in 2020 the plant will recolonize in areas previously treated.

Phragmites threatens both the ecological and recreational importance of the Rondeau Bay and Long Point Bay areas. Stands of Phragmites crowd out native vegetation and hinder native wildlife from using the area, resulting in a decrease in both plant and animal biodiversity. Invasive Phragmites can also lead to changes in hydrology, causing boating channels to become overgrown, wetlands to dry up, loss of nursery and spawning habitat for fish, and access points for recreation.

Prior to initiation of the pilot in 2016, the ministry and other organizations had been working to ensure that ecological integrity is maintained in these areas by controlling Phragmites where it occurs on dry land using a variety of techniques including a combination of herbicide, mechanical controls, and prescribed burns. However, the success of these control activities was limited due to the lack of registered herbicides for use in aquatic habitats in Canada. This restricted the extent of control activities and

enabled Phragmites to continue to spread and thrive in these coastal marsh areas, contributing to ongoing degradation of ecological integrity.

Registration of herbicide products is a federal procedure conducted by Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency. Following successful Emergency Registrations between 2016 and 2019, the ministry has received approval from the Pest Management Regulatory Agency in 2020 to continue the use of an herbicide in wetland areas of Long Point Bay and Rondeau Provincial Park. The basis of the emergency is due to the imminent threat that Phragmites poses to species at risk within these sensitive wetland complexes. If control is not continued, these species are at imminent risk of extirpation at these sites.

The herbicide is approved for aquatic use in the United States (the U.S.) by the Environmental Protection Agency and is considered to be environmentally safe and extremely effective in coastal wetland restoration efforts. It has been used successfully by several U.S. states for controlling Phragmites in coastal wetland areas in the Lake Erie basin.

This pilot project will build upon previous and on-going Phragmites control efforts that have been undertaken in both regions.

2.1 Rondeau Provincial Park

The colonization and expansion of Phragmites in the wetland habitats at Rondeau Provincial Park is a significant threat because these wetlands are recognized globally, nationally and provincially as important areas for biodiversity. Rondeau is ranked as a provincially-significant Life Science Area of Natural and Scientific Interest and a Provincially Significant Wetland. It is also a globally significant Important Bird Area for congregatory species, as well as for waterfowl and migratory land bird concentrations. The variety of habitats within this Important Bird Area contributes to significant bird diversity. Every year, thousands of migrating waterfowl use the area as a stopover and rest point during their travels. The Rondeau Bay wetlands are also home to 17 species on the Species at Risk in Ontario List, which are dependent on the wetland to fulfill one or more of their life functions (e.g. breeding, hibernation, birthing, foraging, etc.).

The threat from Phragmites encroachment and dominance within the Rondeau wetlands also impacts tourism, socio-economic values for the area, and recreational opportunities

that are well known to anglers, naturalists, vacationers, and waterfowl hunters, resulting in reductions in aesthetic view-scapes, and increased difficulties for boat launching and shoreline recreational fishing. Rondeau Bay is also a critical area for fish that are harvested through the commercial fisheries on Lake Erie, which is a multi-million dollar industry that stands to be significantly impacted by Phragmites encroachment in shallow waters targeted by many fish species as spawning and nursery areas.

2.2 Long Point Region

The Long Point Region (including the Turkey Point wetland complex and lower Big Creek watershed) is internationally recognized under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's World Biosphere Reserve program, and under the Ramsar Convention as an internationally important wetland. Additionally, these areas are designated as Provincially Significant Wetlands, and a Provincial Life Science Area of Natural and Scientific Interest.

The Long Point Region sand spits and associated marshes are also globally significant Important Bird Areas for threatened and congregatory species, waterfowl concentrations, and migratory land bird concentrations. The Long Point peninsula itself is a significant migratory bird hotspot that attracts birders from around the world who contribute to the local economy.

Additionally, the Long Point area provides many recreational and tourism opportunities, including angling, waterfowl hunting, camping, hiking, nature appreciation, and several water sports. It is also critical spawning and nursery grounds supporting the important Lake Erie commercial fishing industry and several non-commercial fisheries.

3.0 Project Description

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks have considered the use of all approved methods and tools for Phragmites control, in order to attempt to manage Phragmites occurring on Crown lands. Tools and methods currently registered and available for use are outlined in detail within the guidance document "Invasive Phragmites – Best Management Practices" (Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry 2011).

In 2015, both ministries staff completed project requirements under both the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's Class Environmental Assessment for Resource Stewardship and Facility Development and the Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves. Staff also completed these requirements to expand the control areas to include Turkey Point and the Big Creek Watershed (2017) and Turkey Point Provincial Park (2017/2018).

Because no single control mechanism is effective on its own for this species, an Integrated Pest Management approach will be taken to control Phragmites. Control actions may include any combination of cultural control (e.g., burning), mechanical control (e.g., rolling or cutting) and chemical control (e.g., herbicide application).

Between August 15 and October 31, 2020, the ministry in collaboration with the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks' Ontario Parks, the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Canadian Wildlife Service will undertake control of Phragmites using a variety of methods of herbicide application, as per the conditions that have been prescribed by the Pest Management Regulatory Agency on the product label, and as permitted by the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks through their Permit(s) to Perform an Aquatic Extermination. The Nature Conservancy of Canada is the leading partner on this project in terms of coordination and treatment of Phragmites on private lands. The project may also undertake a fish monitoring plan, as per conditions prescribed by Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

Herbicides will be primarily applied by ground methods, including as the primary method of control within both Rondeau Provincial Park and the Long Point Region; it should be noted that the herbicide is applied directly to the dense canopy of Phragmites, and that herbicide will not be sprayed in open water areas. The areas proposed for treatment in 2020 are outlined below.

- Long Point Crown Marsh and Long Point Provincial Park (Figure 1)
- Long Point (Private lands and Long Point Crown Tip) (Figure 2)
- Lower Big Creek Wetland Complex (Figure 3)
- Turkey Point Wetland Complex (Private lands) (Figure 4)
- North shore of Long Point Inner Bay (Figure 5)
- Big Creek Watershed Phases (1-8) areas (Figure 6)
- Rondeau Provincial Park (Figure 7)

If conditions and resources permit, following the herbicide treatment of Phragmites, it will be cut or rolled (no earlier than 3-4 weeks after pesticide treatment to ensure sufficient transport of the herbicide to the root system) and possibly burned during the appropriate window. Sites will be checked post-treatment, to document success or need for repeat treatments (i.e. presence/absence of Phragmites).

4.0 Environmental Mitigation

4.1 Chemical Control

An herbicide (Roundup® Custom For Aquatic & Terrestrial Use Liquid Herbicide, Registration Number 32356 Pest Control Products Act; active ingredient glyphosate) will be used in this project. This use will follow all requirements of the *Ontario Pesticides Act*, the federal *Pest Control Products Act*, and all other relevant legislation. Use of this pesticide will be done following Integrated Pest Management principles including:

1. Focusing control actions to vulnerable stages of the target plant;
2. Using appropriate application technology to minimize non-target impacts;
3. Monitoring weather and only applying when off-target deposition can be minimized;
4. Integrating herbicide control with other physical methods (rolling, burning) to maximize effectiveness;
5. Associated monitoring of effects on soil, water and wildlife;
6. Monitoring, evaluation and reporting of the results of this spray program.

4.2 Reducing Non-target Impacts to Wildlife and Plants

4.2.1 Herbicide Application Area

Herbicide application will be targeted Phragmites plants directly and will not be sprayed in open water areas. All efforts will be undertaken to minimize non-target impacts to other plant species. The timing of herbicide application will also assist to avoid impacts to the majority of native plants as they will be entering dormancy for the winter.

4.2.2 Herbicide Application Timing

For Rondeau Provincial Park, in order to avoid impacts to recreational hunting within regulated waterfowl hunting units, herbicide application will be completed sometime between September 1st and October 31, 2019 outside of regulated hunting days.

For Long Point Crown Marsh, Long Point Provincial Park, and Long Point Tip ground herbicide application may occur any time between August 15th – October 31st, 2020; however, the majority of ground treatment will most likely occur after Labour Day (September 8) and be completed by the end of September. Herbicide application is intended to occur prior to the opening of waterfowl season on September 26th, 2020. Application will not occur on Waterfowler Heritage Day on September 19th, 2020.

Operations in the private lands of Turkey Point, Lower Big Creek and Long Point may occur between August 15th and October 31st.

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This timing window is also ideal for minimizing indirect impacts, as bird breeding/nesting seasons are completed, amphibians and reptiles will be staging (preparation stages for hibernation), most native plants have senesced and insects have completed the majority of their life stages.

4.2.3 Follow Up Treatments (Cutting, Rolling and Prescribed Burning)Timing

Once treated, follow up treatments are an important component of an integrated management plan for Phragmites. This can involve cutting, rolling and/or burning of standing dead stalks to allow native plants to re-establish.

Rolling and/or cutting of dead stalks of Phragmites generally occurs in the winter months when there is sufficient ice cover to enable access by equipment.

Prescribed burns for Phragmites may be undertaken between November 1st, 2020 and March 31st, 2021 – and is dependent on several environmental factors. The ministry and partners will aim to burn the treated sites during this timing window. Use of data loggers during dormant season burns has shown that below ground temperature increases from fire are minor in nature and are limited to ~1 inch depths from the surface. Therefore, the ministry is confident that dormant season burns are unlikely to have negative impacts on hibernating species.

4.2.4 Motorized Access

In order to reduce impacts to wildlife, any motorized access for the purpose of Phragmites control will be limited to:

- Lightweight, slow-moving vehicles (e.g. specialized Argo, Marsh Master etc.), or
- Boats

5.0 Monitoring

Although the pilot project's proposed use of herbicide containing glyphosate in aquatic habitats for control of Phragmites is not unique in the United States, this is a unique project to Canada. As such, it is important to monitor and document the results of this pilot project to inform similar control initiatives in the future within Ontario, and Canada. The ministry has formed partnerships with the University of Waterloo, Nature Conservancy of Canada and other conservation organizations, and created a Monitoring Plan to assess the following:

1. Efficacy of the herbicide treatment – continuation of surveys of vegetation plots established in 2016 to assess changes in the vegetation communities as a result of the project;
2. Effects of the control activity on sensitive emergent coastal marsh vegetation communities;
3. Fate of glyphosate, AMPA and the adjuvant in water and sediment at treatment sites, and their dispersal from treatment sites;
4. Assessment of risks of the herbicide application to the wetland food-web (including amphibians);
5. Changes resulting from the control activity on fish habitat; and
6. Surface water samples from shoreline residences adjacent to treatment areas at Lower Big Creek, and Long Point will also be analyzed to determine glyphosate presence and/or concentration.

6.0 Communications and Notification

Pesticide use notification plans for Rondeau Provincial Park and Long Point Region have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Ontario Pesticides Act, 1990.

All notification actions are designed to meet the public's general right to know about herbicide applications made to outdoor public places that are owned or controlled by public authorities, and allow members of the public to take action to avoid potential contact with herbicides, if they wish. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks' Ontario Parks will ensure that herbicides are applied to public places in a safe, responsible manner, minimizing harm to the community and the environment.

The ministry or the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks' (for Rondeau, and Long Point Provincial Parks) will notify members of the public and the following stakeholder groups about herbicide applications made for the purpose of controlling Phragmites in aquatic areas at Rondeau Provincial Park and Long Point Region prior to the commencement of any work:

Long Point:

- Residents of Long Point
- Residents of Turkey Point
- Any resident within 800 m of a herbicide application area that may have a surface water intake
- Turkey Point Property Owners Association
- Long Point Ratepayers Association
- Boaters
- Waterfowl Hunters
- Municipality, Health Unit, Ontario Provincial Police, Fire Department, local hospitals
- Bird Studies Canada
- Turkey Point and Long Point Provincial Park staff, Day users and Campers
- Long Point Phragmites Action Alliance
- Long Point and Big Creek National Wildlife Areas – Canadian Wildlife Service Staff, and Day users

Rondeau Provincial Park:

- Campers
- Park Day Users
- Cottage Leaseholders and Other Tenure Holders
- Park Staff
- Friends of Rondeau
- Boaters (including the Rondeau Yacht Club)
- Waterfowl Hunters
- Municipality, Health Unit, Ontario Provincial Police, Chatham-Kent Police Service, Fire Department

Notification arrangements have been based on an assessment of the level of usage of the areas where pesticide may be used and the extent to which activities generally undertaken in these areas could lead to the potential for contact with herbicides.

7.0 Safety

Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) is responsible for assessing pesticide products and approving their registration for sale and use in Canada. The emergency use registration of the herbicide for the pilot project was evaluated by PMRA, to ensure that necessary measures are in place to protect people, animals and the environment. As such, PMRA has prescribed specific conditions for the ministry's use of the herbicide to ensure the safety of human health and the environment.

The Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) administers the *Pesticides Act* and Ontario Regulation 63/09 which provides the province's framework for regulating the sale, use, transportation, storage and disposal of federally regulated pesticides to protect human health and the natural environment. In accordance with Ontario's pesticides legislation, permit(s) are required from the MECP to use a pesticide in water, for this pilot project. Applications for a Permit to Perform a Water Extermination or Aerial Extermination are reviewed by MECP's Regional Pesticides Specialist. Permits that are issued to authorize use of the herbicide for this pilot include specific terms and conditions such as set back distances from sensitive areas, public notification

requirements and other conditions to prevent impacts to human health or the environment.

The permit holder(s), responsible for the aerial and ground herbicide application are provincially licensed exterminators under the *Pesticides Act*, and are responsible for preparing and adhering to plans to ensure the safety of applicators, the public and the environment.

Agency Notifications

Prior to commencement of the project, the local municipalities, health units, Ontario Provincial Police, fire departments and hospitals at Rondeau and Long Point will be notified. The local health authorities will also be provided with toxicological information about glyphosate prior to initiation of the project to ensure they are prepared to address health concerns from the public.

Local residents, park visitors, and other stakeholders will be provided with contact information for the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks' Spills Action Centre and the local Pesticide Specialist.

8.0 Contact Information

Further information on the project and herbicide use can be obtained by visiting the Long Point Phragmites Action Alliance at longpointphragmites.ca. Questions regarding the project and specific locations can be directed to the following contacts:

Long Point Crown Marsh

Anyone wishing to contact the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry to obtain details of the 2020 Phragmites Control Project at Long Point Crown Marsh should contact;

Dave Depuydt, Resources Management Coordinator - Aylmer District Office:

Phone: 548-588-1486

Email: dave.depuydt@ontario.ca

Long Point Provincial Park

Anyone wishing to contact Ontario Parks to discuss the plan or to obtain details of the 2020 Phragmites Control Project should contact:

Jeff Pickersgill, Park Superintendent

Phone: 519-426-7138 ext. 227

Fax: 519-586-3581

Email: jeffrey.pickersgill@ontario.ca

Long Point and Turkey Point and Big Creek Privately-owned Marshes

Anyone wishing to contact the Nature Conservancy of Canada to discuss the details of the 2020 Phragmites Control Project should contact:

Eric Cleland, Director - Invasive Species Program

Phone: 226-231-8213

Email: eric.cleland@natureconservancy.ca

Rondeau Provincial Park:

Anyone wishing to contact Ontario Parks to discuss the plan or to obtain details of the 2020 Phragmites Control Project should contact:

Brad Connor, Rondeau Provincial Park Superintendent

Phone: 519-674-1760

Email: brad.connor@ontario.ca

Long Point and Big Creek National Wildlife Areas

Danny Bernard, Wildlife Technician, Canadian Wildlife Service
Environment and Climate Change Canada / Government of Canada

Phone: 519-586-2839 Cell: 519-428-8703

Email: Danny.Bernard@Canada.ca

9.0 Mapping

9.1 Long Point Region

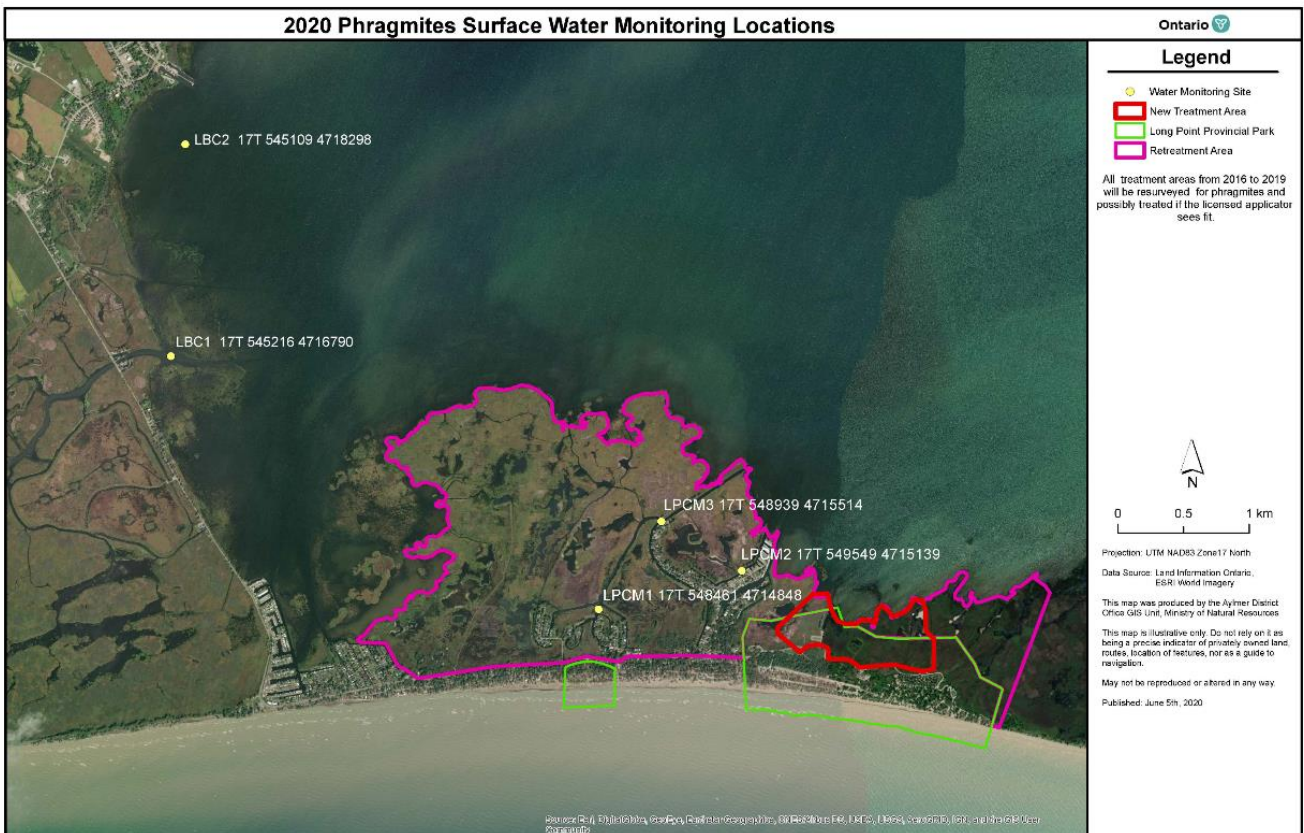


Figure 1: Proposed new and retreatment areas at Long Point Crown Marsh and Long Point Provincial Park, 2020-2023.



Figure 2: Proposed retreatment areas at Long Point Company, Gravelly Bay and Long Point Tip (2020-2023).

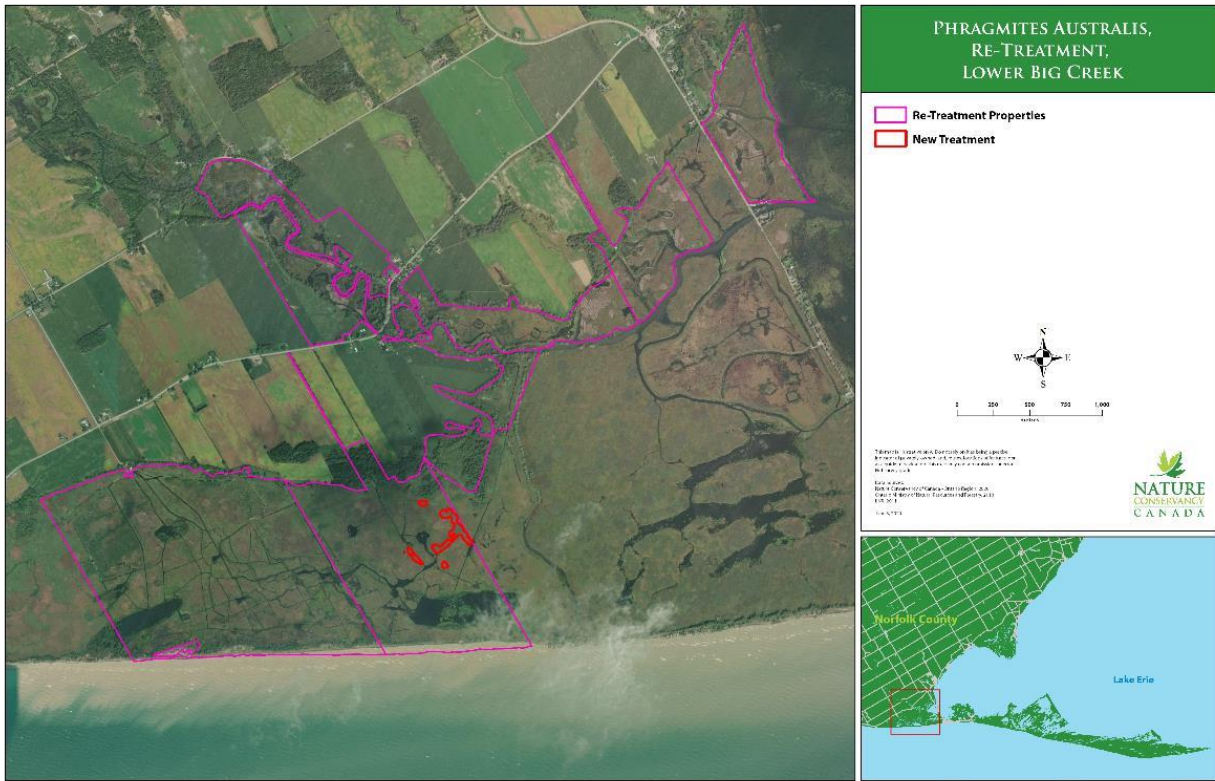


Figure 3: Proposed new and retreatment areas at Lower Big Creek (2020-2023).

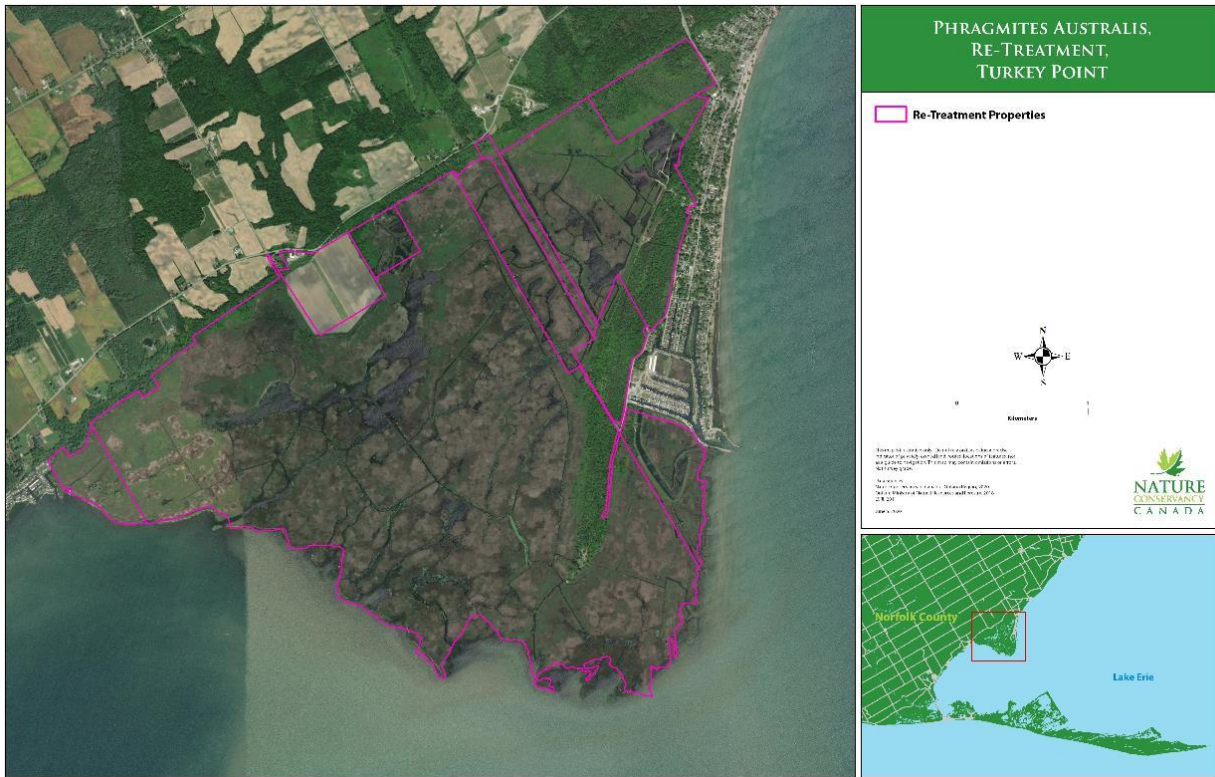


Figure 4: Proposed retreatment areas at Turkey Point (2020-2023).



Figure 5: Proposed retreatment areas at North Shore, Long Point Bay (2020-2023).

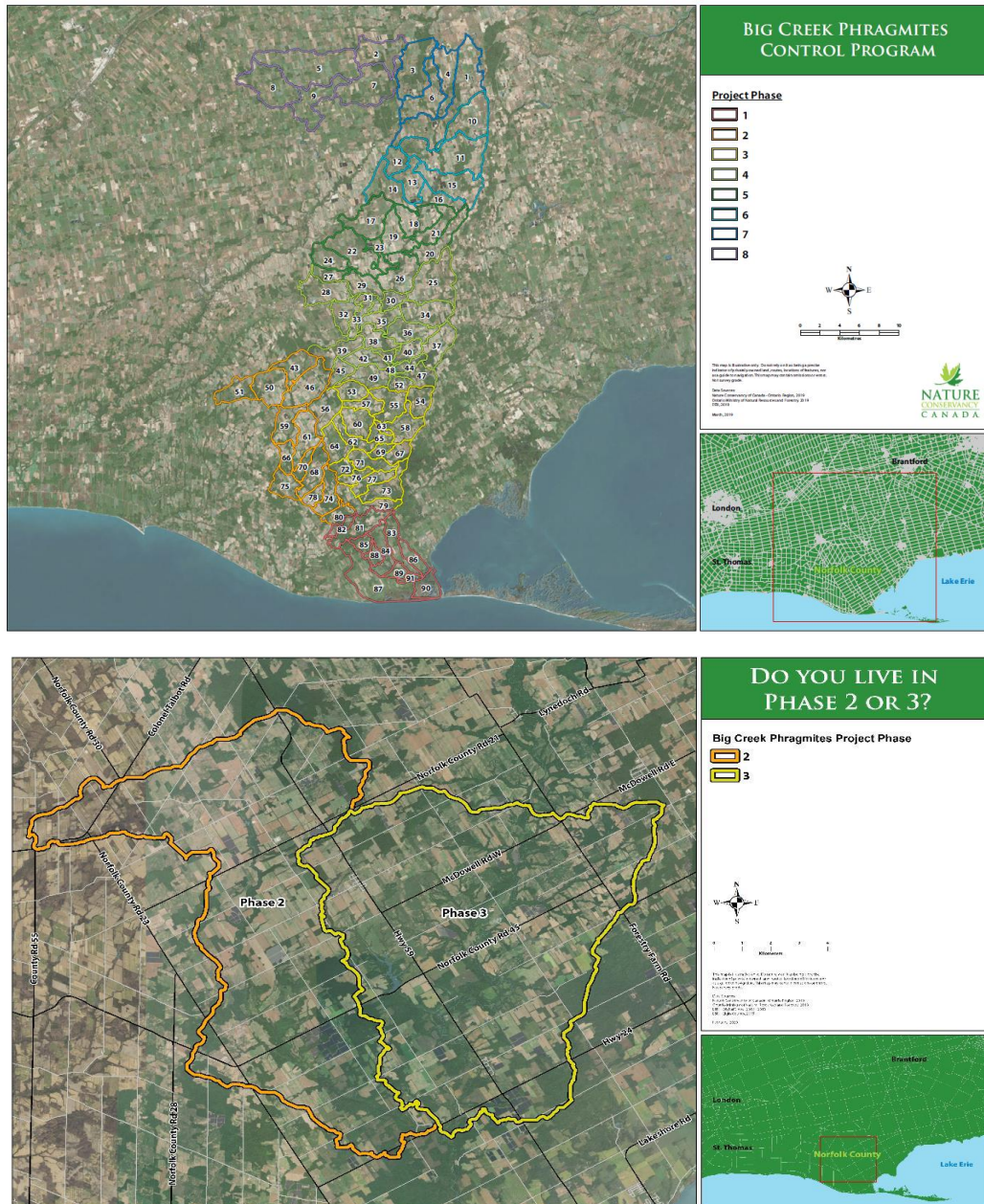


Figure 6: Proposed treatment areas at Big Creek watershed 2020-2023. (Note: Most locations identified with Phragmites at these locations will be terrestrial sites and will not require the application of aquatic herbicides). Upper image dictates 8 phases of Big Creek, lower image shows zoomed in to Phases 2 & 3 planned for 2020 Those sites that are proposed for aquatic treatment are not navigable and are not directly connected to a navigable waterway.

9.2 Rondeau Provincial Park

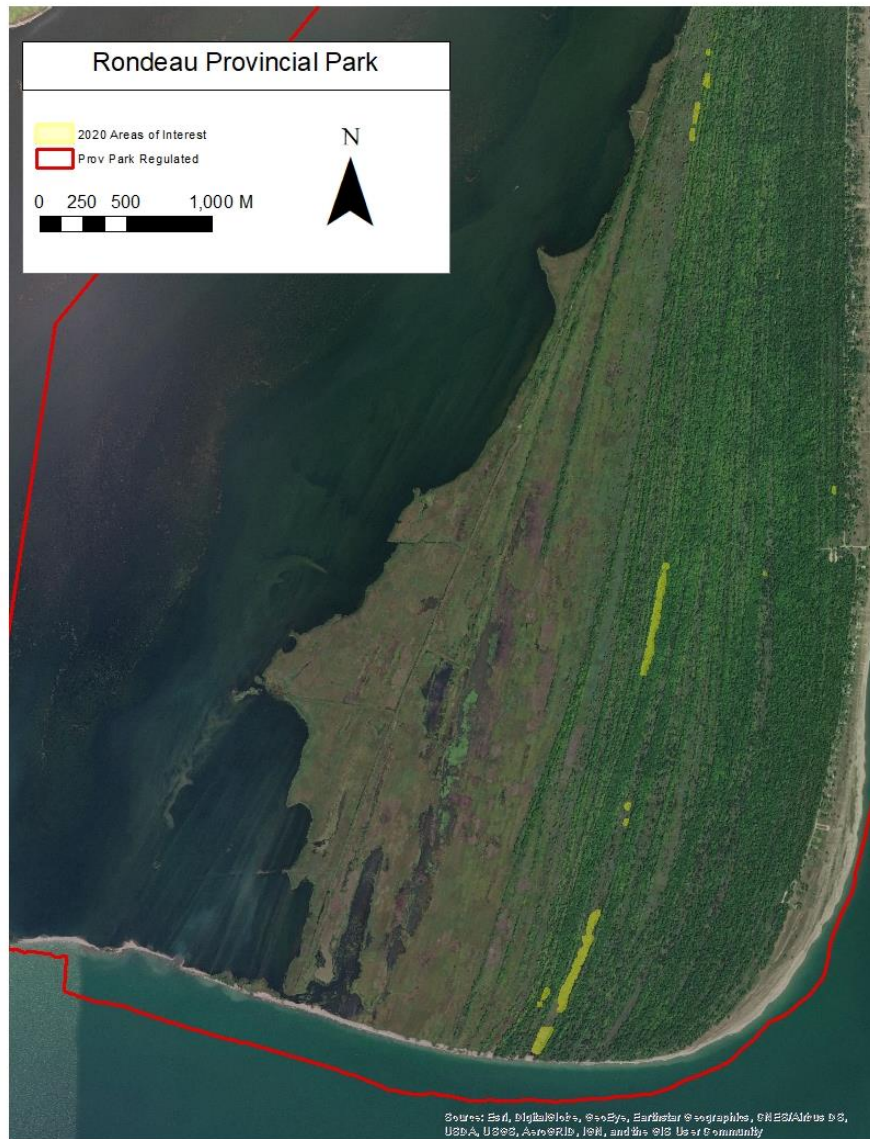


Figure 7: Proposed treatment areas at Rondeau Provincial Park.