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## Maine

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### WEEDS VS. RARE PLANTS AND BIRDS

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*Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge - 2005*

Since 2002, Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge in Maine has been controlling non-native, invasive phragmites by mowing it without mercy.

Phragmites, a tall, aggressive weed threatens not only refuge neighbors with its extreme flammability, but can adversely affect two rare wetland species.



*A mower cuts down invasive phragmites - a flammable weed that competes with native plants such as the state-listed blue flag iris - at Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge in Maine (USFWS)*

The portion of the refuge with the biggest phragmites infestation also is home to largest population of the state-endangered slender blue flag iris ( *iris prismatica* ). Thousands of iris plants grow on the refuge's Webhannet Marsh, where phragmites is held at bay with a specialized mower once or twice each summer. The regimen seems to be working because the persistent weed has become much less dense in the past three years. Other plants, including some of the rare iris, have begun to sprout in former phragmites strongholds. The periodic mowing also indirectly benefits the saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow, which inhabits the wetlands that phragmites can easily engulf.

This project has not only reduced the risk of wildfire on the refuge, and subsequently area homes, but has helped protect a rare plant site. Removing phragmites helps prevent it from getting started in new areas. The weed can spread when storms dislodge it and deposit it in new areas along the coast.

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