

Giant Hogweed Clean-Up

Staff of the Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority (GRCA) have removed a number of Giant Hogweed plants from the floodplain of Wilmot Creek in the Thurne Parks Conservation Area. Giant Hogweed is an invasive plant from Europe which was introduced to North America as an ornamental, but is now rapidly spreading across southern Ontario, posing a threat to native species as well as humans. It has recently been added to the provincial list of noxious weeds due to the health risk it represents.

Giant Hogweed contains a clear sap which has phototoxic properties. When exposed to the sun the sap causes severe burns and blistering to the skin, and can even potentially result in blindness if it gets in the eyes. Giant Hogweed is recognizable primarily by its great height, as it has the ability to grow from 3-5m in ideal conditions. The thick hollow stems of these plants have purple flecks and the huge leaves are deeply serrated. The flat-topped white flowers resemble giant versions of Queen Anne's Lace.

Great care must be taken in the removal of Giant Hogweed. GRCA staff wore protective clothing, masks and goggles to ensure that no sap made contact with skin, and had soap and water on hand to wash skin, boots, clothing, and tools. The plants were clipped into pieces and the root was dug out with a shovel and placed in a plastic garbage bag for disposal to ensure there would be no re-growth. Flowers were not present, but when they are, these should be disposed of in the same way. Hogweed control should take place before it becomes established within a habitat, which means before the flowers go to seed.

Due to the risks present from interacting with the invasive plant, the GRCA urges those who believe they have spotted Giant Hogweed to submit a report through the Invasive Species Hotline at 1-800-563-7711 or call the GCRA office to have a sighting confirmed.

