



City of Cambridge

Executive Department

YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

CMA 2025 #295
IN CITY COUNCIL
December 15, 2025

To the Honorable, the City Council:

In relation to Awaiting Report #25-64 regarding poison ivy remediation at Fresh Pond, please see attached a response from Director of the Water Department, Mark Gallagher.

Very truly yours,

Yi-An Huang
City Manager





CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
MASSACHUSETTS

Water Department
250 Fresh Pond Parkway
Cambridge, Mass. 02138



City of Cambridge – Water Department

250 Fresh Pond Parkway
Cambridge, MA 02138
December 9, 2025

To: Cambridge City Council

Subject: Response to Policy Order 2025-148 – Poison Ivy Management at Fresh Pond

Dear Councilors,

Thank you for your attention to the ongoing issue of poison ivy at Fresh Pond, as outlined in **Policy Order 2025-148**. We appreciate the Council's commitment to public health and environmental stewardship, and we welcome the opportunity to provide an update on current efforts and proposed improvements.

Current Management Practices

The Water Department has long recognized the challenges posed by poison ivy, particularly along the perimeter fence and trail areas. As a drinking water supply site with off-leash dog access, our management options are limited:

- **Chemical controls** such as glyphosate are prohibited due to water safety concerns.
- **Goat grazing** is not viable due to water protection regulations prohibiting livestock on watershed protection land and the presence of off-leash dogs.
- **Organic methods** (e.g., salt sprays and weed steamers) have proven ineffective or impractical.
- **Volunteer crews** are not permitted due to liability risks as exposure to the plant can cause severe allergic reactions.

Our most effective strategy has been the use of a **2-person crew** trained to handle poison ivy safely. Whenever possible, the crew is made up of individuals with known immunity to poison ivy. This crew is deployed during the growing season to manually remove poison ivy in high-risk areas such as the Fresh Pond shoreline, Glacken Slope, Little Fresh Pond, and the Birch Grove. Each winter, contracted landscape laborers also trim back vines (including poison ivy) inside the perimeter fence.

Signage and Public Awareness

We acknowledge that current signage may be insufficient. While laminated warnings exist, they are not highly visible in some locations and lack multilingual accessibility. We support the Council's recommendation to install **clear, durable signage** in English and other commonly spoken languages in Cambridge. These signs would include:

- Visual identification of poison ivy
- Health risks associated with contact
- Instructions for avoiding exposure

(An example of the current warning signs and a map of current sign locations is included in appendix A)

Funding and Future Planning

We will continue exploring opportunities to leverage grant funding such as the **MassTrails Grant**, which has supported poison ivy removal projects in neighboring communities. Additionally, we propose integrating poison ivy control more explicitly into the **Fresh Pond Master Plan** maintenance schedule, with annual reviews and budget considerations.

Next Steps

We will coordinate with the City Manager's office and relevant departments to prepare a formal follow-up report for the Council. This will include:

- A summary of current and past mitigation efforts
- A signage improvement plan based on current city standards
- Budget estimates for expanded maintenance
- Recommendations for long-term strategy integration

We appreciate your leadership on this issue and look forward to working together to ensure Fresh Pond remains a safe and welcoming space for all residents.

Sincerely,

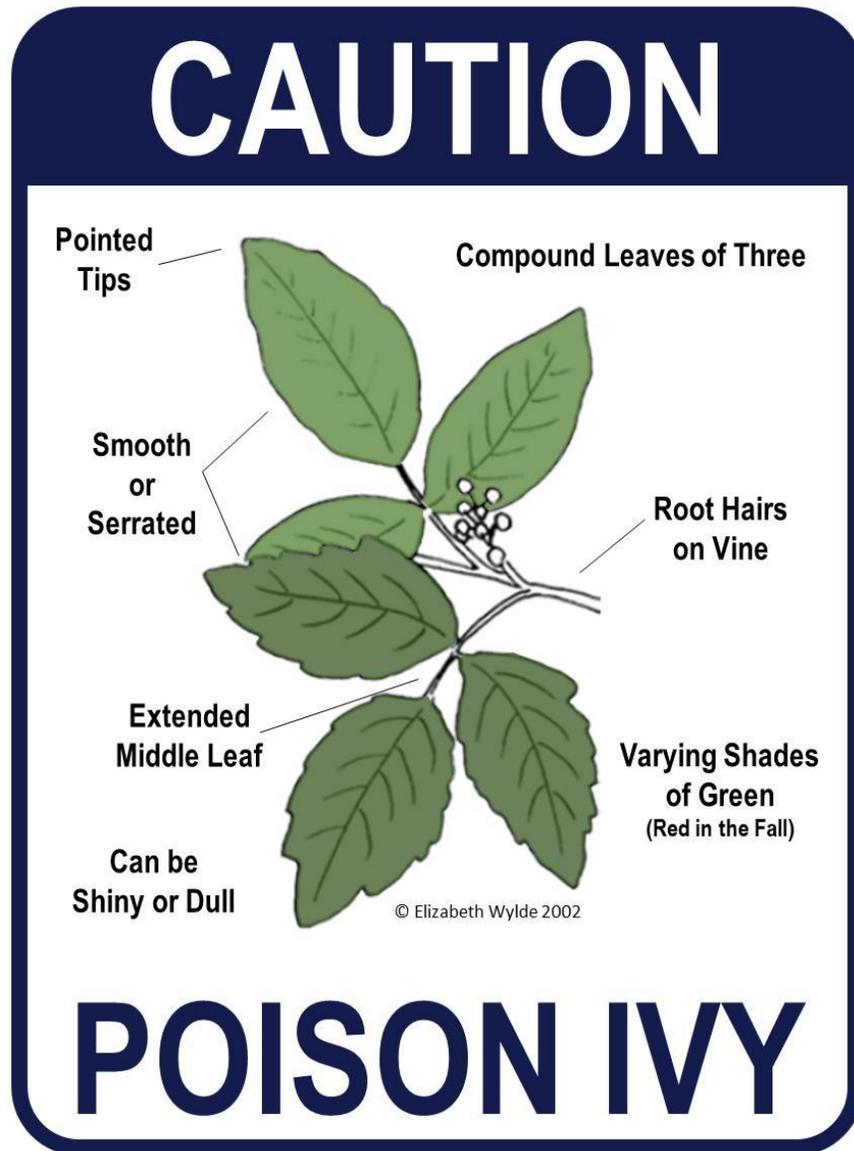
Mark Gallagher

Managing Director

City of Cambridge Water Department

mgallagher@cambridgema.gov

Appendix A



Example of current Poison Ivy warnings signs



14 sign locations marked by a: 

Signs have a metal face and are all fastened in a permanent manner to the reservoir fence in areas where Poison Ivy is most prevalent

Sign size: 6.75" x 9"



Map of Poison Ivy sign locations at Fresh Pond