

Few-flowered Sedge

Carex pauciflora

Description

Few-flowered Sedge is a perennial, relatively delicate grass-like plant that produces wide-spreading underground stems, or rhizomes. The three-sided aerial stems may grow to 1½ feet (0.5 m) in height, but are often much shorter. The leaves include a sheathing basal portion and an elongate and narrow blade that is alternately arranged and only about 1/16 inch (1-2 mm) in width. The minute flowers, which appear in spring, are clustered at the tip of the stem, with the male flowers at the very top and several (usually 1-6) female flowers directly below. The plant is most recognizable when fruiting in late spring and early summer, with the fruits being enclosed in sac-like structures, or perigynia, which in this species are particularly elongate and slender, being about 5/16 inch (7 mm) in length and 1/16 inch or less (0.8-1.2 mm) in width, tapered to a pointed tip, and conspicuously point downward.



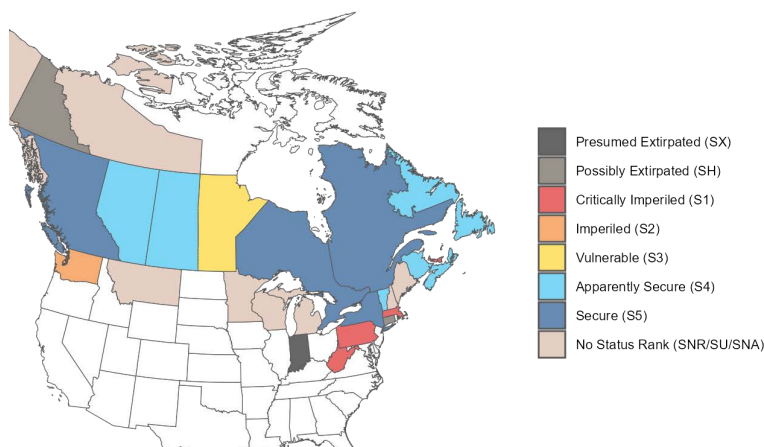
Photo source: John Kunsman (PNHP)

Distribution & Habitat

Few-flowered Sedge has a transcontinental range across the cooler regions of North America. In Pennsylvania, it is considered a northern species, and has been documented historically in the glaciated northeastern and northwestern counties. The species grows in bogs and peaty wetlands, especially on floating sphagnum moss mats around bog pools.

North American State/Province Conservation Status

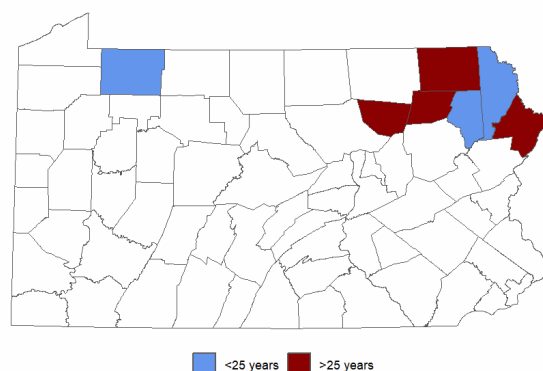
Map by NatureServe 2025



Current State Status

The PA Biological Survey (PABS) considers Few-flowered Sedge to be a species of special concern, based on the few locations that have been recently confirmed and the specialized habitat. It has a PA legal rarity status and a PABS suggested rarity status of Endangered.

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Conservation Considerations

The viability of populations of Few-flowered Sedge and its habitat may be enhanced by creating buffers and protecting the natural hydrology around bogs and controlling invasive species. Few-flowered Sedge is an indicator species for bog habitats that feature various orchids, insectivorous plants such as sundew, bladderwort, and pitcher plant, and other interesting species.

NatureServe conservation status ranks

G5 – Globally secure; S1– Critically Imperiled in Pennsylvania

References

- NatureServe. 2025. NatureServe Explorer [web application] NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available at <https://explorer.natureserve.org> (Accessed: May 8, 2025)
- Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program. 2025.
- Rhoads, A.F. and W.M. Klein, Jr. 1993. The Vascular Flora of Pennsylvania: Annotated Checklist and Atlas. American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Rhoads, A.F. and T.A. Block. 2007. The Plants of Pennsylvania: An Illustrated Manual. 2nd edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.