

Hard-stemmed Bulrush

Schoenoplectus acutus

Description

Hard-stemmed bulrush is an erect, grass-like perennial that grows from a spreading rhizome. The firm, round stems can reach up to 10 feet (3 meters) in height. Despite the common name, this species is not actually a rush, but a sedge. The leaves grow mostly near the base of the stem. Each plant has only 3 to 4 leaves, which are made up of short blades and longer sheaths. The sheaths are often red-tinged near the base. The flowers can be found in spikelets that are held in a small, branched cluster, or inflorescence. The inflorescence has stiff, upright branches and seems to be growing out of the side of the stem. This is due to a leaf-like bract that originates near the inflorescence and appears as a continuation of the stem. Plants can be found fruiting from June to August.

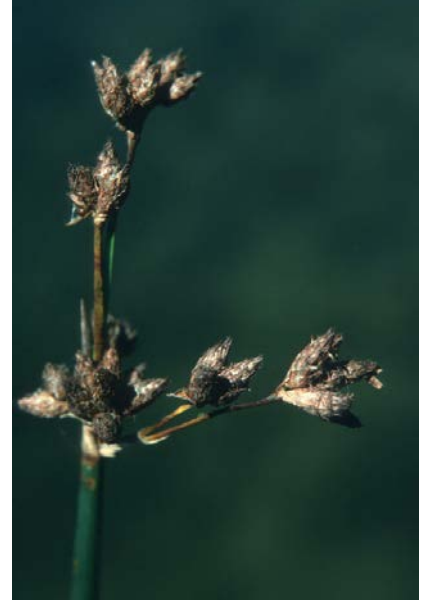
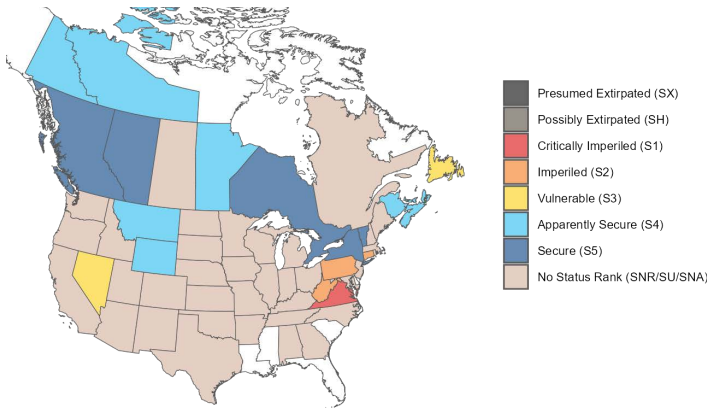


photo source: Robert W. Freckmann
Herbarium, UWSP, Robert W. Freckmann

North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe 2025



Distribution & Habitat

Hard-stemmed bulrush has a distribution throughout North America. In Pennsylvania, the occurrences are localized in the western and central counties. It grows in wetlands and can be found in the shallow water along the edges of lakes or ponds.

Current State Status

The PA Biological Survey considers hard-stemmed bulrush to be a species of special concern, based on the few occurrences that have been confirmed and the wetland habitat. It has been assigned a rarity status of Endangered.

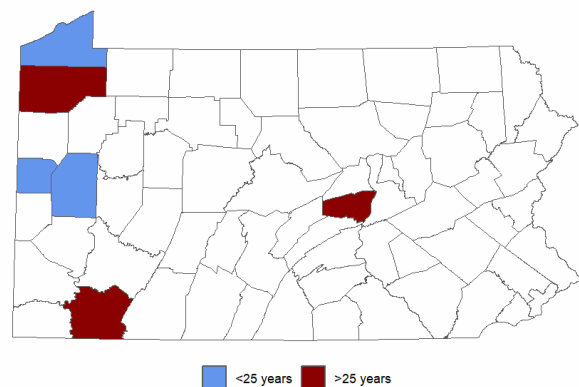
Conservation Considerations

Conservation of hard-stemmed bulrush will require protection of known populations and of their wetland habitat. This may require consideration of the entire pond or lake community. Surrounding these communities with buffers could help to protect them from the effects of run-off or flooding. Sustaining appropriate water levels will also be important for maintaining high quality habitats.

NatureServe conservation status ranks

G5 – Globally secure; S2 – Imperiled in Pennsylvania

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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.
- Rhoads, A.F. and T.A. Block. 2000. The Plants of Pennsylvania: An Illustrated Manual. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.