

Broad-winged Sedge

Carex alata

Description

Broad-winged Sedge is a grass-like herbaceous perennial with a three-sided stem that may reach 3 feet (1 m) in height. The leaves are alternately-arranged, consisting of a sheath-like basal portion around the stem and a flattened, linear-elongate, and untoothed blade that is ¼ inch or less (2-6 mm) in width. The greenish flowers, which appear in spring, are minute and clustered near the top of the stem in several dense globe-shaped clusters that are about 3/8 inch (8-12 mm) in length. The female flowers are grouped at the top of each cluster and the male flowers are grouped at the bottom. The individual fruits have an orbicular shape, with a relatively broad wing-like margin that gives the plant its common name, and average about 3/16 inch (5 mm) in length. Care must be taken in distinguishing this species from the numerous other similar species that occur in Pennsylvania.

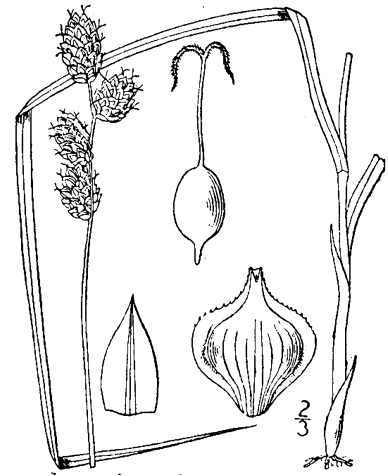


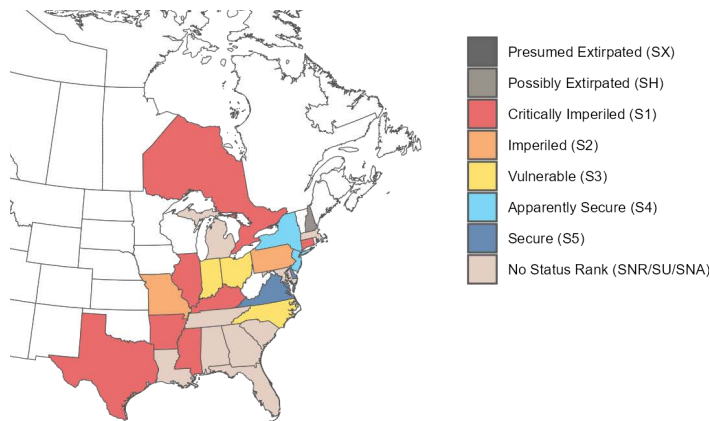
Photo source: USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database

Distribution & Habitat

Broad-winged Sedge ranges from New Hampshire to Ontario and south into Florida and Texas. In Pennsylvania, it has been documented historically mostly in the northwestern counties. The species grows in marshes, swamps, meadows, and fens, particularly those with limestone or non-acidic substrates.

North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe 2025



Current State Status

The Pennsylvania Biological Survey (PABS) considers Broad-winged Sedge to be a species of special concern, based on the limited number of locations recently documented and the specialized wetland habitat. The species has a PA legal status and a PABS suggested status of Threatened. Broad-winged Sedge ranges from New Hampshire to Ontario and south into Florida and Texas.

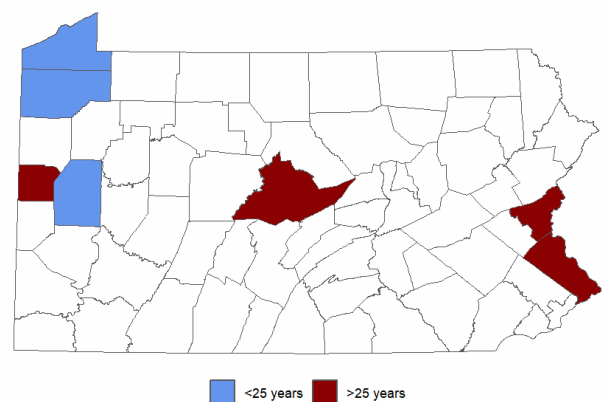
Conservation Considerations

The viability of populations of Broad-winged Sedge and its habitat may be enhanced by creating buffers and protecting the natural hydrology around wetlands and controlling invasive species.

NatureServe conservation status ranks

G5? – Globally secure; S2 – Imperiled in Pennsylvania

Broad-winged Sedge (*Carex alata*)



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. American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Rhoads, A.F. and T.B. Block. 2007. The Plants of Pennsylvania: An Illustrated Manual. 2nd edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

