

# Terrestrial & Palustrine Plant Communities Of Pennsylvania

By Jean Fike

## Serpentine grassland

This community type is part of the "Serpentine barren complex." It is restricted to areas underlain by serpentinite bedrock. The dense, prairie-like graminoid cover is usually dominated by warm-season (C4) grasses. Warm-season grasses characteristic of this community include *Schizachyrium scoparium* (little bluestem), *Muhlenbergia mexicana* (muhly), *Eragrostis spectabilis* (purple love-grass), *Setaria geniculata* (perennial foxtail), *Andropogon gerardii* (big bluestem), *Sporobolus heterolepis*<sup>S</sup> (prairie dropseed), *Sorghastrum nutans* (Indian grass), and *Bouteloua curtipendula*<sup>S</sup> (side-oats gramma). Other species commonly found include *Senecio anonymus*<sup>S</sup> (plain ragwort), *Aristida purpurascens*<sup>S</sup> (arrow-feather), *A. dichotoma* (churchmouse three-awn), *Aster depauperatus*<sup>S</sup> (serpentine aster), *Panicum acuminatum* (a panic-grass), *P. annulum* (annulus panic-grass), *P. dichotomum* (a panic-grass), *P. oligosanthes* (a panic-grass), *P. sphaerocarpon* (a panic-grass), *Potentilla canadensis* (old-field cinquefoil), *Rosa carolina* (prairie rose), *Setaria geniculata* (perennial foxtail), *Cerastium arvense* var. *villosissimum*<sup>S</sup> (barrens chickweed), *Phlox subulata* ssp. *subulata* (creeping phlox), *Achillea millefolium*<sup>I</sup> (yarrow), *Eupatorium aromaticum* (small white snakeroot), *Scleria pauciflora* (few-flowered nutrush), *Oenothera fruticosa* (sundrops), *Solidago nemoralis* (gray goldenrod), *Antennaria plantaginifolia* (plantain pussytoes), *Asclepias verticillata* (whorled milkweed), and *A. viridiflora* (green milkweed).

**Related types:** This community may be said to end either where graminoid dominance and continuous soil substrate ends (here the "Serpentine gravel forb community" generally begins), or where shrub cover reaches about 25% (here the "Red-cedar - pine serpentine shrubland" generally begins).

**Range:** Piedmont.

**Selected references:** Latham 1992, PNDI field surveys.

**[Crosswalk:** Smith's "Eastern Serpentine Barren," TNC's *Pinus (virginiana, rigida)* / *Schizachyrium scoparium* Herbaceous Alliance, *Pinus virginiana* - *Pinus rigida* / *Schizachyrium scoparium* - *Scleria pauciflora* Community.]