American Columbo
Frasera caroliniensis

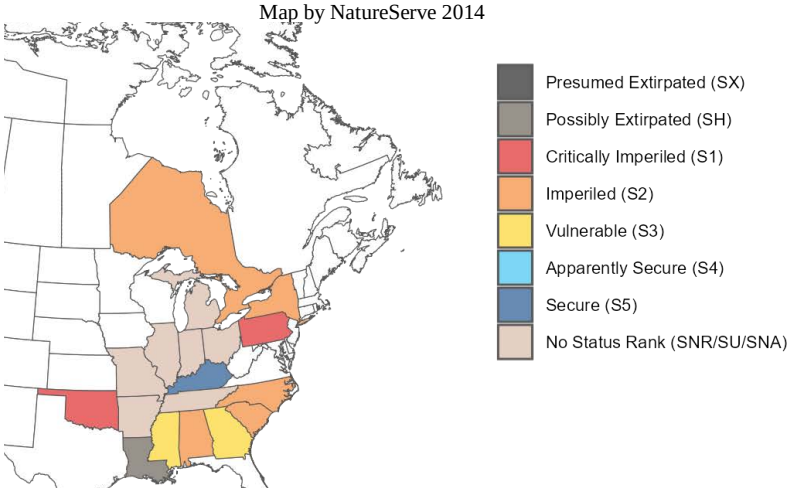
Description

American columbo is a stout perennial in the gentian family (Gentianaceae). It is monocarpic, meaning that it lives for several years without flowering, flowers when mature, and dies after setting fruit. Despite being described in the literature as biennial or triennial, unpublished research by the late Virginia Phelps demonstrated that plants live for more than a decade before blooming. As a result, populations may be present as only basal rosettes in some years. The flowers have four petals, and the fruits are flattened capsules that can remain on the stems for a year or more. These stems can be over two meters tall

Photo by Edward W. Chester, courtesy of The University of Tennessee Herbarium

North American State/Province Conservation Status

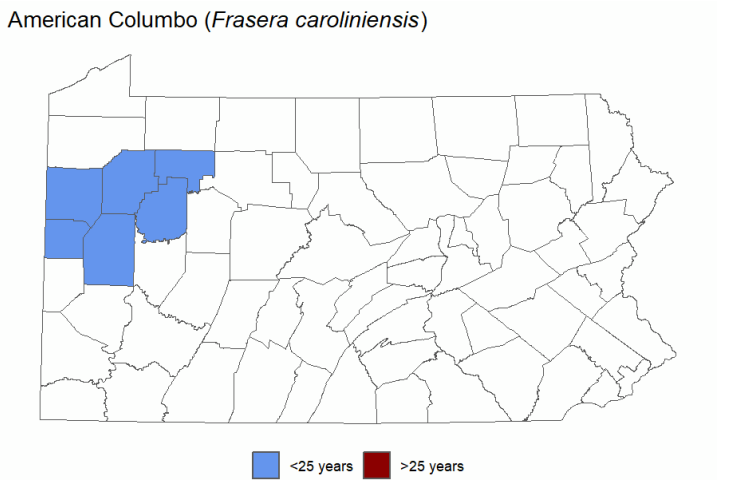
Map by NatureServe 2014



Distribution & Habitat

This species is found in the Mississippi Valley and eastward to the Appalachian Mountains; north to southern Ontario and south to northern Georgia and Alabama (and formerly Louisiana). It is absent from New England. It grows in moist to dry successional habitats, open or sparsely wooded.

American Columbo (*Frasera caroliniensis*)



Current State Status

American columbo has a PA legal rarity and a PABS suggested rarity status of Endangered.

Conservation Considerations

Because this is a successional species, cautious thinning of the canopy may be critical for long-term success at specific sites. The species may be declining due to suppression of fire, which once set succession back occasionally.

NatureServe conservation status ranks: G5 – Globally secure; **S1** – Critically imperiled in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program

References

- NatureServe. 2025. NatureServe Explorer [web application] NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available at https://explorer.natureserve.org (Accessed: May 8, 2025)
- Rhoads, A.F. and T.B. Block. 2007. The Plants of Pennsylvania: An Illustrated Manual. 2nd edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.