

Few-flowered Nutrush

Scleria pauciflora

Description

Few-flowered nutrush is a perennial herb with triangular, tufted stems that grow from 8 to 20 inches (2-5 dm). The leaves are alternately arranged, linear, elongate, variably hairy, and up to 1/10 inch (3 mm) wide. The flowers, appearing from June to September, are minute, unisexual, and are grouped in clustered spikelets at the top of the stem. The fruits are less than 1/8 inch (1-2.5 mm) long, but have a curious appearance in being hard and white (similar to a piece of bone or tooth), globe-shaped with a short-pointed tip, warty on the surface, and having a basal “platform” of 6 tuber-like structures.

Distribution & Habitat

Few flowered nutrush has a range from southern Canada south into Texas and the Gulf Coast states. In Pennsylvania, it has been documented historically mostly in the southeastern counties, where it grows on serpentine barrens.

North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe 2025

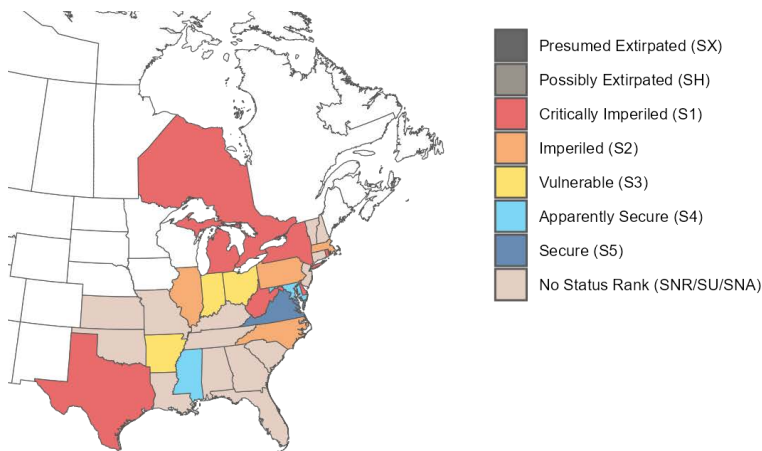


Photo source: Rocky Gleason (PNHP)

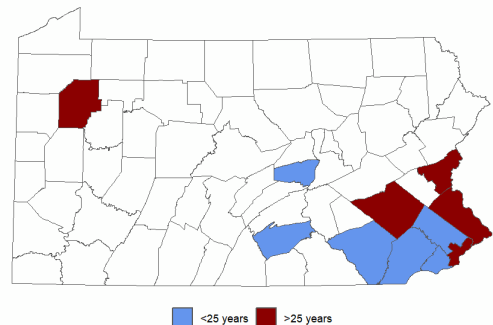
Current State Status

The PA Biological Survey (PABS) considers few-flowered nutrush to be a species of special concern, based on the relatively few occurrences that have been recently confirmed and its specialized serpentine habitat. It has a PA legal rarity status and a PABS suggested rarity status of Threatened. About 15 populations are currently known from the state.

Conservation Considerations

The viability of populations of few-flowered nutrush and its serpentine habitat will require maintaining early successional conditions and controlling invasive species. Active management, through the use of fire, scraping the substrate, or mowing, may be needed to create the proper successional stage and ecological conditions for this species to thrive. Quarrying and habitat loss are threats in some locations.

Few Flowered Nutrush (*Scleria pauciflora*)



NatureServe conservation status ranks

G5 – Globally secure; S2– Imperiled in Pennsylvania

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.A. Block. 2007. The Plants of Pennsylvania: An Illustrated Manual. 2nd edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.