Tufted Hairgrass
Deschampsia cespitosa

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Description

Photo source: PNHP

Tufted hairgrass is a perennial grass that grows to 4 feet (about 12 dm) in height. The leaves are arranged alternately, linear in shape, elongate, narrow (1-5 mm in width), and tend to be clumped at the base of the plant in a tufted manner. The tiny individual flowers, appearing in May and June, are grouped in pairs in spikelets that are 2.5 to 5.5 mm in length and are scattered in an open branched terminal grouping that stands above the leaves. The spikelets are often tinged with purple.

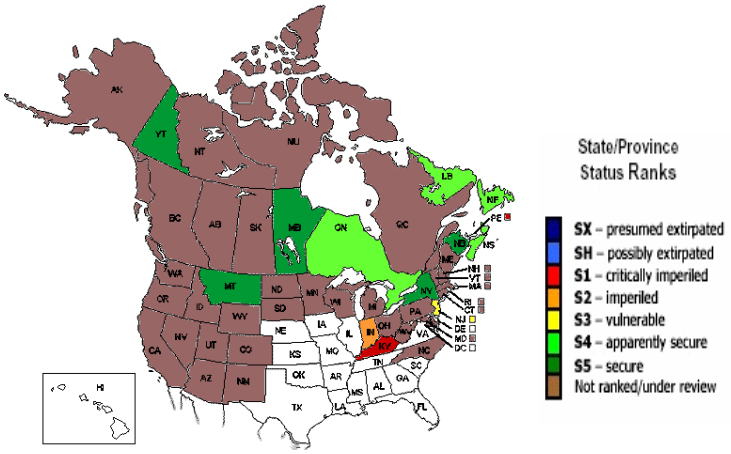
Distribution & Habitat

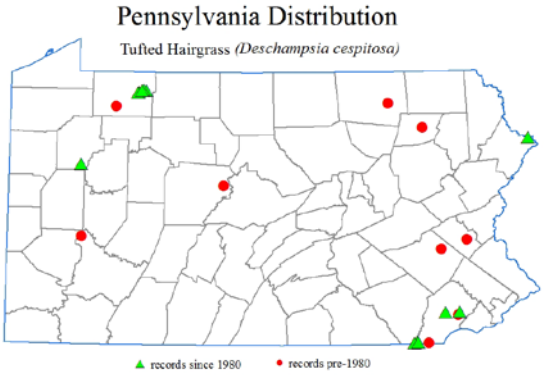
Tufted hairgrass has a wide range across the northern part of North America. In Pennsylvania, it has been documented historically in several widely scattered, particularly eastern, counties. It grows in various habitats, including serpentine barrens, riverbed scours, marshes, damp openings, and along streams.

Current State Status

The PA Biological Survey (PABS) considers tufted hairgrass to be a species of special concern, based on the few occurrences that have been recently confirmed. It does not have a PA legal rarity status, but has been assigned a PABS suggested rarity status of Undetermined. About 10 populations are currently known from the state.

North American State/Province Conservation Status
Map by NatureServe 2014





Conservation Considerations

The viability of the populations on serpentine barrens will require maintaining early successional, grassland conditions and controlling invasive species. Active management, such as 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. The riverine populations of tufted hairgrass will require maintaining the natural hydrology of the stream, with its seasonal fluctuations in water levels, as well as retaining the natural conditions of the shorelines and islands. Invasive species may be a threat in some locations. The viability of populations in wetlands may be enhanced by establishing buffers around wetlands, controlling invasive species, and protecting the natural hydrology surrounding wetlands.

NatureServe conservation status ranks

G5 – Secure globally; S3 – Vulnerable in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program

References

- NatureServe. 2014. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 6.1. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available http://www.natureserve.org/explorer.
- Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program. 2014.
- Rhoads, A.F. and T.A. Block. 2007. The Plants of Pennsylvania: An Illustrated Manual. 2nd edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.