

Eastern Gamma-grass

Tripsacum dactyloides

Description

Eastern gamma-grass is a tall perennial grass that usually stands 4 to 8 feet (12-24 dm) tall, often forming conspicuous clumps. The leaves are flat, linear, and up to 1¼ inches (3 cm) wide and 12 to 30 inches (3-7.5 dm) long. The flowers, appearing from July to October, are arranged in 1 to 4 thick spikes that emerge from the top of the stem. The individual flowers are unisexual, with male flowers located at the top of the spike and the female flowers being embedded in swollen stem segments at the base of the spike.



Photo source: PNHP

Distribution & Habitat

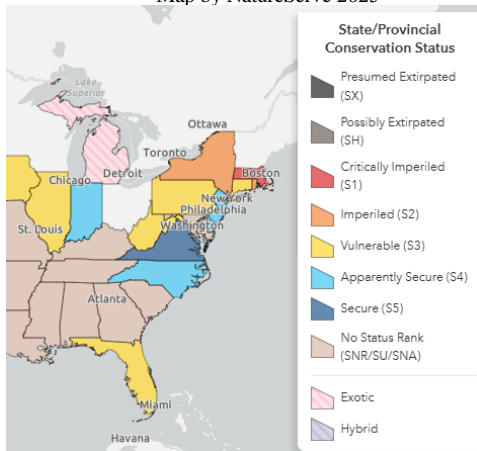
Eastern gamma-grass has a distribution from southern New England west into Nebraska, and south into Florida and Texas. In Pennsylvania, it represents a southerly species, and has been documented historically in some of the southeastern counties. It grows in damp to wet places in openings, streambanks, islands in the Susquehanna River, and sometimes in disturbed ground.

Current State Status

The PA Biological Survey considers eastern gamma-grass to be a species of special concern, based on the relatively few occurrences that have been recently documented and its wetland habitat. It has a PA legal rarity status of Undetermined. With fewer than 10 populations in PA, eastern gamma-grass is vulnerable to habitat loss and changes in hydrology that might influence habitat quality, such as damming or draining rivers and increased groundwater use. Conversion of floodplain forests, browsing by deer, and encroachment by invasive plants may degrade the quality of existing habitat. Nutrient enriched run-off from surrounding land can affect the water chemistry to which this species is sensitive.

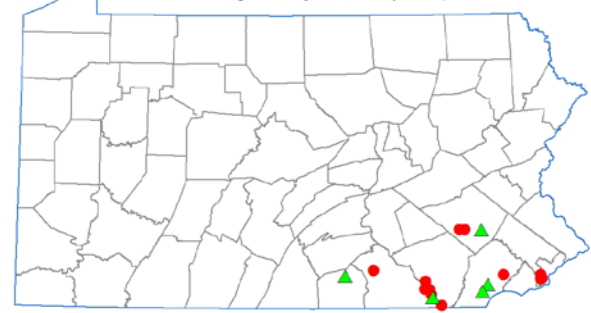
North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe 2025



Pennsylvania Distribution

Eastern Gamma-grass (*Tripsacum dactyloides*)



Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program Data 3-2014

Conservation Considerations

Conservation of eastern gamma-grass will depend upon the protection of existing populations and maintenance of its required habitat. This may include removing invasive plants and creating buffers to help moderate the effects of run-off and flooding. Sustaining appropriate water levels is also important for maintaining high quality habitats.

NatureServe conservation status ranks

G5 – Globally secure; S3 – Vulnerable in Pennsylvania



Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program

References

- NatureServe. 2006. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 6.1. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available at <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>.
- Rhoads, A.F. and T.A. Block. 2007. The Plants of Pennsylvania: An Illustrated Manual. 2nd edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.