Bur-reed
Sparganium angustifolium

Description

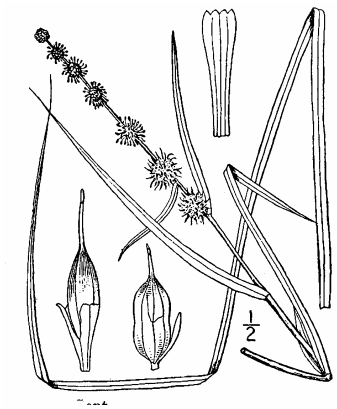


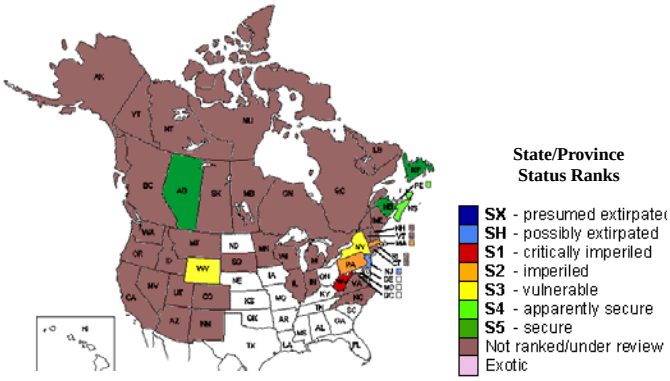
Photo source: USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database Photo source: PNHP

Bur-reed is a perennial aquatic grass-like plant that may grow to over 2 feet (.6 m) in length. The base of the plant is rooted in the substrate and the leaves are oriented upward, with the upper portions and tips remaining in the water and tending to float on the water surface. The leaves are alternately arranged, hairless, untoothed on the edges, and consist of a basal sheathing portion that envelopes the stem and an elongate, narrow, ribbon-like blade that can be 1 foot (.3 m) or more in length and only about 3/16 inches (2-6 mm) in width, and somewhat spongy when compressed. The minute flowers, appearing in spring and early summer, are separated into male and female clusters, with the former near the tip and the latter farther down the stem, and are exposed to the air for pollination. The most prominent part of the plant and the source of the common name is the fruiting stage, which consists of a bur-like aggregate of individual fruits, each of which is 3/16 inch (3-6 mm) in length and tapers in width to both ends. Identification of bur-reeds can be difficult, and some species that normally have stems that grow upright and above the water surface can produce forms that resemble *S. angustifolium* in being submersed and floating.

Distribution & Habitat

Bur-reed has a transcontinental range across the cooler regions of North America. In Pennsylvania, it represents a northerly species, and has been documented historically mostly in the northeastern counties. It grows in lakes, ponds, and slow-moving streams.

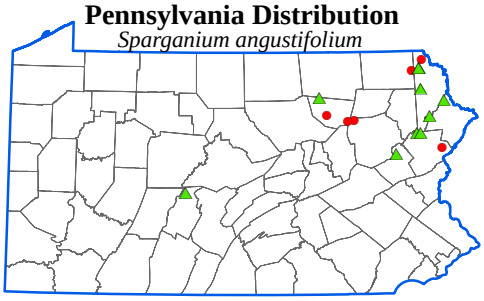
North American State/Province Conservation Status
Map by NatureServe 2010



Current State Status

The PA Biological Survey (PABS) considers Bur-reed to be a species of special concern, based on the few locations recently confirmed and the specialized habitat. It does not have a PA legal rarity status, but has a PABS suggested rarity status of Threatened.

Pennsylvania Distribution
Sparganium angustifolium



records since 1980 ● records pre-1980
Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program Data 3-2011

Conservation Considerations

The viability of populations of Bur-reed and its habitat may be enhanced by creating buffers and protecting the natural hydrology around wetlands and controlling invasive species.
The species may be threatened by the indiscriminate use of aquatic herbicides at some locations.

NatureServe conservation status ranks

G5 – Globally secure; S2 – Imperiled in Pennsylvania

References

- NatureServe. 2011. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.1. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available http://www.natureserve.org/explorer.
- Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program. 2011.
- Rhoads, A.F. and W.M. Klein, Jr. 1993. The Vascular Flora of Pennsylvania. American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Rhoads, A.F. and T.A. Block. 2007. The Plants of Pennsylvania: An Illustrated Manual. 2nd edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

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