



Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

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Description: Hairy Beardtongue is a light green, erect, herbaceous perennial in the Snapdragon or Figwort family (Scrophulariaceae). The stem is hairy or “hirsute” – hence, the species name *hirsutus*. Hairy Beardtongue’s stem grows from 4 to 8 dm (1–3 ft.) high and is covered with long, whitish hairs. Its stem-borne leaves are 5 to 12.5 cm (2-5 in.) long, oblong to lanceolate, opposite, stalkless, and finely toothed. A rosette of stalked leaves surrounds the base of the stem. The dull pink, purplish or violet flowers have petals that are partially fused into a narrow, five-lobed floral tube with two upper lobes and three lower lobes. The corolla is about 2.5 cm (1 in.) long and ends in white lips. Hairy Beardtongue’s flowers occur in loose, stalked cluster. The fruit is an 8 to 9 mm long capsule (a dry fruit derived from a compound pistil that contains many seeds). At maturity, this capsule is more than half covered by the five-parted calyx. Like all members of the genus *Penstemon*, Hairy Beardtongue has five stamens one of which is sterile and topped by a tuft of hairs in place of an anther. Hairy Beardtongue blooms from Late May to early July.

Similar Species: Several non-native species of *Penstemon* occur in Massachusetts and could be confused with Hairy Beardtongue. Foxglove Beardtongue (*P. digitalis*), unlike Hairy Beardtongue, has a smooth stem. Tube Beardtongue (*P. tubiflorus*) has both a smooth stem and white flowers. Pale Beardtongue (*P. pallidus*) has leaves that are hairy on both surfaces, while Hairy Beardtongue may have a few hairs only on the midvein on the leaf under-side.

HABITAT IN MASSACHUSETTS: Hairy Beardtongue is a plant of dry or rocky ground in woods, fields, and on hillsides. In Massachusetts, current habitats (1985-2010) include a dry, open but shaded area near limestone quarries; dry, dolomitic lower slopes and walls of two abandoned quarries; and a dolomitic limestone cobble rising abruptly from a river floodplain.

Hairy Beardtongue

Penstemon hirsutus (L.) Willd.

State Status: Threatened

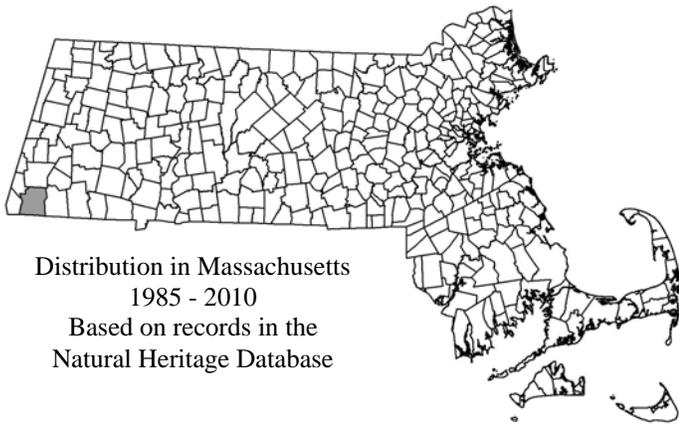
Federal Status: None



Top: Hairy Beardtongue’s light purple flowers. Photo: Bruce Sorrie, NHESP. Bottom: Stem with opposite, stalkless leaves and hairy stem. Photo by and courtesy of Pamela Weatherbee.

Historical habitats in Massachusetts (unverified since 1978) include dry slopes, dry open woods, and dry roadside banks. Associated plant species include various junipers (*Juniperus* spp.), violets (*Viola* spp.) and dogwoods (*Cornus* spp.). Yellow Oak (*Quercus muehlenbergii*) and Narrow-leaved Vervain (*Verbena simplex*) are two rare Massachusetts species that have been found with Hairy Beardtongue.

Range: The range of Hairy Beardtongue extends throughout northeastern North America from Quebec and Maine to Wisconsin, and south to Virginia and Kentucky.



Population Status: There are four current locations (1985-2010) in one town in Berkshire County and the species was known historically (unverified since 1978) from Franklin, Hampshire, and Worcester Counties. Three of the current stations have fewer than 15 plants; at the other site numbers vary from year to year but are usually in the tens to several hundred plants. Hairy Beardtongue is also considered rare in Vermont, Quebec, Wisconsin, and Virginia; it was present historically in Delaware. NatureServe ranks Hairy Beardtongue as globally Apparently Secure, G4.

Hairy Beardtongue is listed under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act as Endangered. All listed species are protected from killing, collecting, possessing, or sale and from activities that would destroy habitat and thus directly or indirectly cause mortality or disrupt critical behaviors.

Management and Threats: Threats include succession and lack of disturbance to rocky slopes and ledges. Two of the current sites are old disturbed areas with many shrubby and non-native invasive species. Populations should be monitored for invasions of exotic plants; if exotic plants are crowding and out-competing Hairy Beardtongue, a plan should be developed, in consultation with the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program, to remove the invaders.

All active management of rare plant populations (including invasive species removal) is subject to review under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act, and should be planned in close consultation with the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

NatureServe. 2010. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.1. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>. (Accessed: December 17, 2010).

USDA, NRCS. 2010. The PLANTS Database (<http://plants.usda.gov>, 17 December 2010). National Plant Data Center, Baton Rouge, LA