



## Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

[www.mass.gov/nhesp](http://www.mass.gov/nhesp)

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

## Willow Aster *Symphotrichum praealtum* (Poir.) G.L. Nesom

State Status: **None**  
Federal Status: **None**

**SPECIES DESCRIPTION:** Willow Aster is a perennial, colonial species with long rhizomes. The mature plants may grow to 2m (6 1/2 feet), and it blooms in late summer. Willow Aster has thick, firm willow-like leaves, conspicuously reticulate beneath with isodiametric areolae (rounded equal areas defined by the veinlets) on the leaf's underside. Flowers (rays) are usually light blue, though may be white on occasion. The plant is described as being glabrous, though plants recently observed in Massachusetts have some pubescence in vertical lines on the stems.

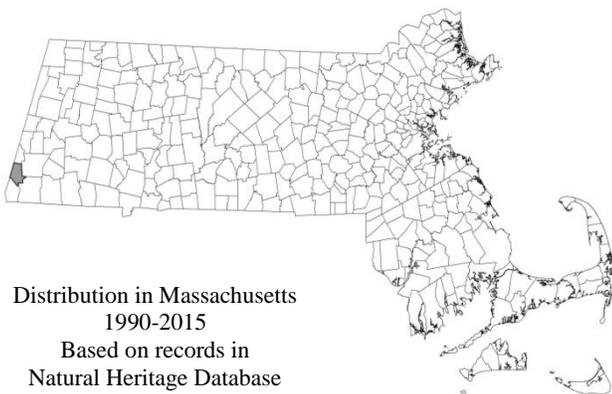
**DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE:** One population of this species has recently been observed in Berkshire County. In the past (pre-1900), this species was observed in Suffolk County in eastern Massachusetts, and was considered historic in the state until 2011. Its range extends from New Brunswick (where it is considered introduced) and Ontario south to Texas and Florida, excluding Delaware and the Carolinas. It is also considered rare in Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, and Ontario; presumed extirpated from the District of Columbus; and vulnerable in Michigan, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

**HABITAT DESCRIPTION:** Gleason and Cronquist (1991) state the species habitat is moist, low ground. The current population in Massachusetts occurs on state-owned land in fields that are mown approximately every three years to keep them open.

**THREATS:** Invasive species such as multiflora rose, Asiatic bittersweet and non-native shrub honeysuckles threaten to shade out the population, despite efforts to remove them. This plant could be easily mistaken for the more common *S. lanceolatum*, and thus not protected but cut or removed.

### REFERENCES:

- Fernald, M.L. 1970. *Gray's Manual of Botany, Eighth (Centennial) Edition - Illustrated*. D. Van Nostrand Company. New York.
- Gleason, H.A., and A. Cronquist. 1991. *Manual of Vascular Plants of Northeastern United States and Adjacent Canada, Second Edition*. The New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, New York.
- Haines, A. 2011. *Flora Novae Angliae*. The New England Wild Flower Society. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.
- NatureServe. 2015. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.1. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available <http://explorer.natureserve.org>. (Accessed: April 28, 2015).



Distribution in Massachusetts  
1990-2015  
Based on records in  
Natural Heritage Database  
Map updated 2015

Prepared 2015

**A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan**

## Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

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Please allow the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program to continue to conserve the biodiversity of Massachusetts with a contribution for 'endangered wildlife conservation' on your state income tax form, as these donations comprise a significant portion of our operating budget.

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