Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

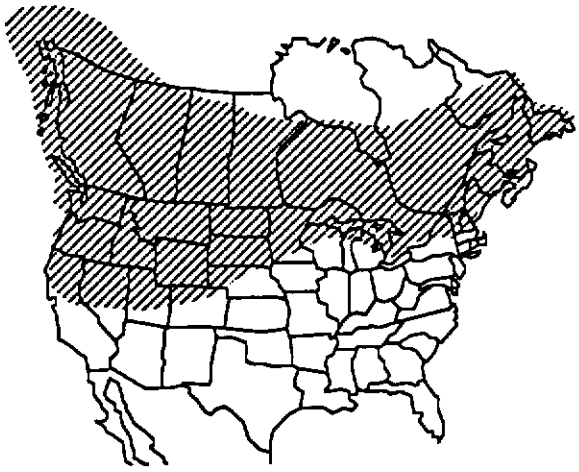
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Division of Fisheries & Wildlife
Route 135
Westborough, MA 01581
(508) 792-7270 ext. 200

MASSACHUSETTS RARE AND ENDANGERED PLANTS

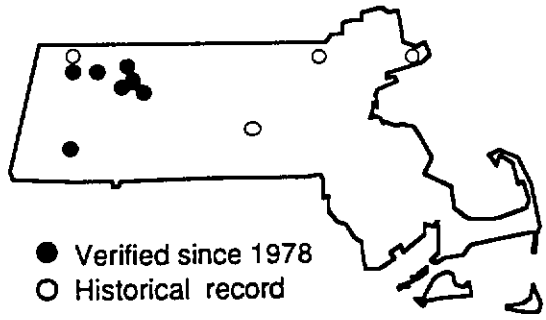
Shore Sedge
(*Carex lenticularis* Michx.)

Cronquist et al. Intermountain Flora
Columbia Univ. Press.

Description: Shore Sedge is a grass-like perennial herb in the Sedge family that grows in tall, 8-24 in. (20-60 cm), dense, vase-shaped clumps. The numerous, pale-green leaves are long and very slender (1-3 mm), considerably overtopping the culms (stems) and flower spikes. The flowering culms are slender, upright and sharply three-angled; each bears a single, terminal staminate (male) spike and 3-8 cylindrical pistillate (female) spikes. Both types of spikes are 1/2-1 in. (1.5-3 cm) long, and are usually bunched together. The flower spikes are composed of overlapping scales distinctively colored dark brown with bold green midstripes. The lens-shaped achenes (dry, 1-seeded fruits) are enclosed in egg-shaped perigynia (seed sacs) which, in this species, are gray-green. Flowering occurs from July to August.



Range of Shore Sedge



Distribution in Massachusetts by Town
1990

Similar Species: The genus Carex is large and complex (ca. 160 species in Massachusetts) and two close relatives of Shore Sedge, Tussock Sedge (Carex stricta) and Twisted Sedge (Carex torta), may be found growing with it. Both resemble Shore Sedge in growth habit and leaf, but are much leafier and usually form denser tussocks. Tussock Sedge has duller brown scales and longer, more widely spaced flower spikes that stand above the leaves. The spikes of Twisted Sedge are also less crowded and noticeably arching or drooping. Neither possess the conspicuously raised nerves that are found on the perigynia of the Shore Sedge.

Range: Shore Sedge is distributed across North America from Newfoundland, Labrador and Hudson's Bay to Alaska, south into the mountains of California, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, across to Minnesota, Michigan, and Massachusetts.

Habitat in Massachusetts: In Massachusetts Shore Sedge appears to be restricted to wet, sandy or gravelly beaches of cold ponds and lakes; or to the exposed rock cobble on islands of large rivers. In the latter, the cobble bars are flooded and submerged every spring and uncovered when the water level drops in summer. Co-occurring species include Reed-bentgrass (Calamagrostris canadensis), Clasping-leaved Dogbane (Apocynum sibiricum), Spike-sedges (Eleocharis) and the aforementioned sedges.

Population Status: Shore Sedge is classified as a threatened species in Massachusetts. There are 7 current verified sites (since 1978) and 6 recorded historical sites. Shore Sedge is primarily a northern species that reaches its southernmost range limit in Massachusetts. Here it is confined to a dynamic and unpredictable habitat, in populations which are small or isolated. Severe alterations to its habitat; by river damming or diversion, and pondshore development, are likely contributors to its rarity.