Natural Heritage &
Endangered Species
Program

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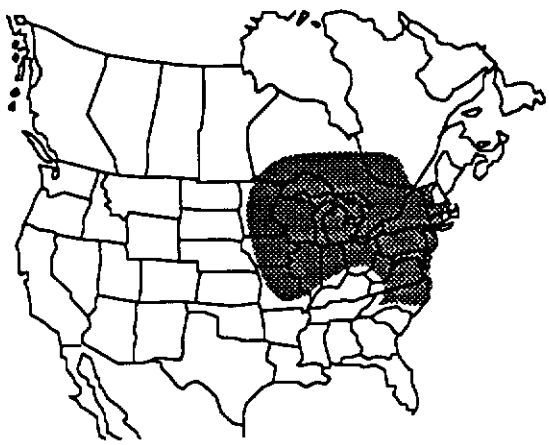
MASSACHUSETTS THREATENED PLANTS

HAIRY-FRUITED SEDGE
(*Carex trichocarpa* Muhl. ex Willd.)

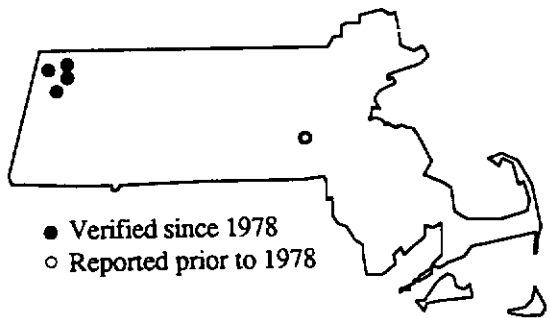
Description

Hairy-fruited Sedge is a slender, dark blue-green, grass-like plant in the Sedge family (Cyperaceae). This tall, fairly robust sedge grows in loose clumps from 6 to 12 dm (1 3/4 - 4 1/4 ft.) in height. The principal leaves are 4-8 mm (4/25 - 8/25 in.) wide and have hairless sheaths (the lowermost, stem-enveloping portions of the leaves). Each sheath is marked by a red stripe at its top. Hairy-fruited Sedge generally has three male, or staminate, spikes and from 2 to 4 female, or pistillate, spikes (clusters of stalkless flowers.) Leaf-like bracts grow out from under these spikes and overtop them. The light brown scales (small, dry, scale-like structures) of the pistillate flowers are marked with light green down the middle and are about one-half as long to as long as the sac-like structures, known as perigynia, that enclose the female reproductive parts. The 6-10 mm (6/25-10/25 in.) long, hairy perigynia are topped by a short, hairy beak (slender protuberance). Hairy-fruited Sedge's fruits mature from early June through early July.

Gleason, H. A. The New Britton and Brown Illustrated Flora of the US & Adjacent Canada. NY Botanical Garden. 1952.



Documented Range of Hairy-fruited Sedge



Massachusetts Distribution by Town

Range

The documented range of Hairy-fruited Sedge extends from Quebec to Vermont, Ontario and Minnesota, south to Delaware, North Carolina, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and southeastern Missouri.

Similar Species

Both Schweinitz's Sedge (*Carex schweinitzii*) and Retrorse Sedge (*C. retrorsa*) have been found growing with Hairy-fruited Sedge in Massachusetts. However, unlike Hairy-fruited Sedge, Retrorse Sedge has hairless perigynia. And Schweinitz's Sedge is generally much shorter than Hairy-fruited Sedge, growing only to 7 dm (2 1/3 ft.).

Habitat in Massachusetts

In New England, Hairy-fruited Sedge occurs in calcareous meadows and swales, especially near rivers. Massachusetts habitats include the edges of floodplain forests and swamps, wet meadows, edges of marshes and ponds and marshy swales. All these habitats are adjacent to or near a river. Plant species associated with Hairy-fruited Sedge include Silky Dogwood (*Cornus amomum*), Cattail (*Typha latifolia*), Reed Canary Grass (*Phalaris arundinacia*), Retrorse Sedge (*Carex retrorsa*) and various other species of sedge (including *Carex* spp. and *Eleocharis* spp.). Schweinitz's Sedge (*Carex schweinitzii*) is a rare Massachusetts plant associated with Hairy-fruited Sedge.

Population Status

Hairy-fruited Sedge is presently listed as "Threatened" in Massachusetts. There are eight current stations (discovered or relocated since 1978) in four towns and two historical stations (unverified since 1978) in the Commonwealth. (One town contains both an historical station and current stations and is represented by a single solid dot on the town distribution map.) Reasons for the plant's rarity in Massachusetts include habitat destruction. Hairy-fruited Sedge is also considered rare in New Hampshire, Vermont, West Virginia, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, and Missouri. It was present historically in Maryland.