Natural Heritage &
Endangered Species
Program

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Division of Fisheries & Wildlife
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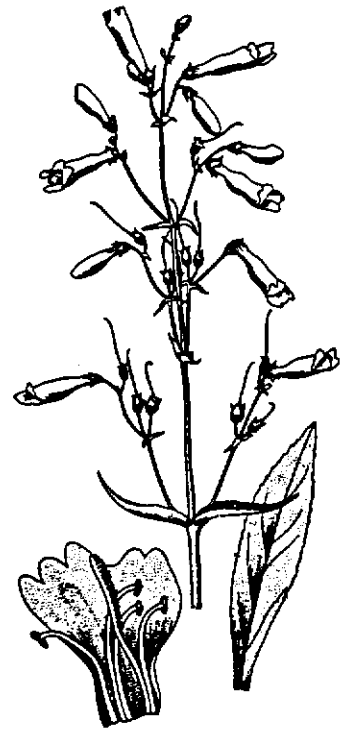
MASSACHUSETTS ENDANGERED PLANTS

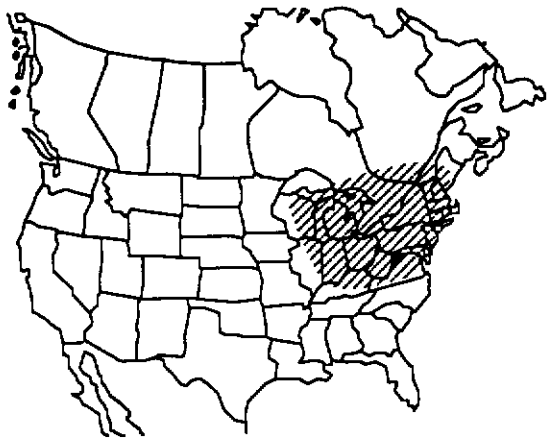
HAIRY BEARDTONGUE
(*Penstemon hirsutus* (L.) Willd.)



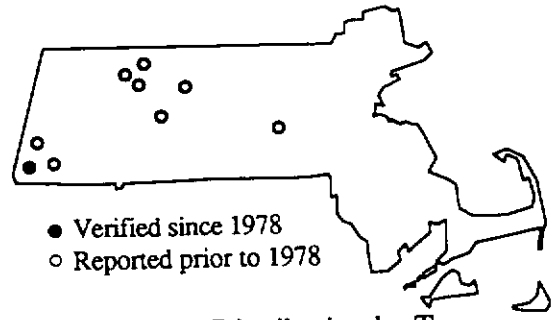
Gleason, H. A. The New Britton and Brown Illustrated Flora of the US & Adjacent Canada. NY Botanical Garden, 1952.

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 4-8 dm (1 - 3 ft.) high and is covered with long, whitish hairs. Its stem-borne leaves are 5-12.5 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 clusters. The fruit is an 8-9 mm (8/25 - 9/25 in.)



Documented Range of Hairy Beardtongue



Massachusetts Distribution by Town

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.

Range

The range of Hairy Beardtongue has been documented as extending from southern Ontario, Quebec and Maine to Michigan and Wisconsin, and south to Virginia and Kentucky.

Similar Species

Four additional species of *Penstemon* occur in the New England area and could be confused with Hairy Beardtongue. Foxglove Beardtongue (*P. digitalis*), unlike Hairy Beardtongue, has a smooth stem. Tube Beardtongue (*P. tubaeflorus*) has both a smooth stem and white flowers. Eastern White 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. Finally, Smooth Beardtongue (*P. laevigatus*) has a stem that is only slightly hairy.

Habitat in Massachusetts

Hairy Beardtongue is a plant of dry or rocky ground in woods, fields, and on hillsides. In Massachusetts, current habitats (discovered or confirmed since 1978) include a dry, open but shaded area near limestone quarries; dry, dolomitic lower slopes and walls of an abandoned quarry; and a dolomitic limestone cobble rising abruptly from a river floodplain. Historical habitats (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 muhlenbergii*) and Narrow-leaved Vervain (*Verbena simplex*) are two of the rare Massachusetts species that have been found with Hairy Beardtongue.

Population Status

Presently, Hairy Beardtongue is listed as "Endangered" in Massachusetts. There are three current stations (discovered or relocated since 1978) in one town and nine historical stations (unverified since 1978) in eight towns in the Commonwealth. Both current stations have less than 15 plants. Threats include succession and lack of disturbance to rocky slopes and ledges. Hairy Beardtongue is also considered rare in Virginia, Vermont, and Wisconsin; it was present historically in Delaware.