Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
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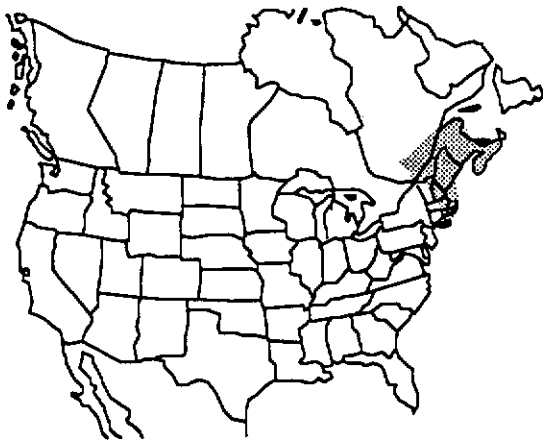
MASSACHUSETTS THREATENED PLANTS

SEABEACH DOCK
(*Rumex pallidus* Bigelow)

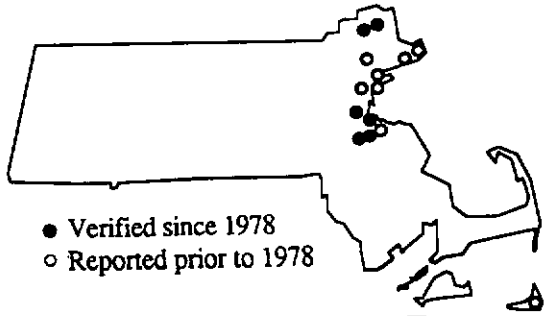
Peterson, R. T. A Field Guide to Wildflowers. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1968.

Description

Seabeach Dock, a member of the Buckwheat family (Polygonaceae), is a medium-sized, herbaceous perennial with conspicuous branched racemes of many, small, crowded, greenish flowers. It grows from 2-7 dm (2/3 - 2 1/3 ft.) high, and its branched stem grows either obliquely upwards or reclines on the ground before ascending. Unlike most members of the genus *Rumex*, Seabeach Dock has leaves that are glaucous (having a whitish, waxy covering). These narrowly lanceolate leaves give the species its alternate common name of White Dock. Its small, greenish, frequently red-tinged flowers are each held on a jointed flower stalk. The plump, whitish achenes (dry, one-seeded fruits that retain their seeds) are nearly as long as the achene wings. Seabeach Dock fruits from mid July to late September.



Documented Range of Seabeach Dock



Massachusetts Distribution by Town

Range

The documented range of *R. pallidus* extends from Newfoundland to the lower St. Lawrence, Quebec, and south along the coast to Long Island.

Similar Species

Curly-leaved Dock (*Rumex crispus*) often occurs with Seabeach Dock. However, *R. crispus* has wavy-edged leaves. It also has one large and two small achenes per flower, in contrast to the three similar achenes of *R. pallidus*.

Habitat in Massachusetts

Seabeach Dock is a plant of beaches and coastal swamps. Its habitats in Massachusetts include upper beaches with cobble, cobble and gravel, shale and shell, or gravelly sand substrates. Somewhat atypically, a station also occurs on a cobbly, exposed flat shore of the Merrimack River. Associated species include Seaside Goldenrod (*Solidago sempervirens*), Curly-leaved Dock (*Rumex crispus*), Beach Pea (*Lathyrus japonicus*), Wrinkled Rose (*Rosa rugosa*), and Dunegrass (*Elymus mollis*).

Population Status

R. pallidus is presently listed as "Threatened" in Massachusetts. There are six current stations (discovered or relocated since 1978), and there are ten historical stations (unverified since 1978) in nine towns. (One town has both a current and an historical station and is represented by one solid dot on the town distribution map.) In part, Seabeach Dock is rare here because Massachusetts is near the southernmost edge of its range. Nevertheless, heavy use of beaches by people and their vehicles poses a threat to Seabeach Dock. Seabeach Dock was present historically in New Hampshire and Vermont.