Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts**
**Division of Fisheries & Wildlife**
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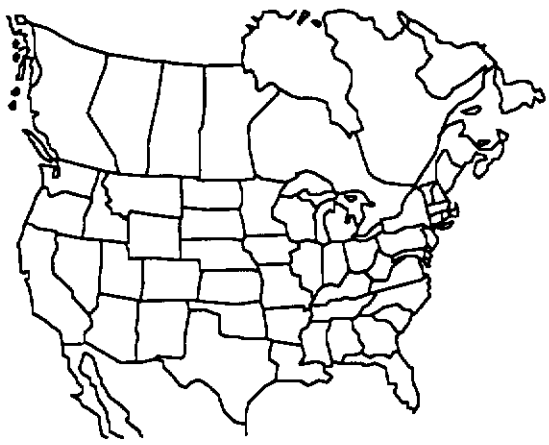
## MASSACHUSETTS THREATENED PLANTS

### SHINING WEDGE GRASS
(*Sphenopholis nitida* (Biehler) Scribn.)

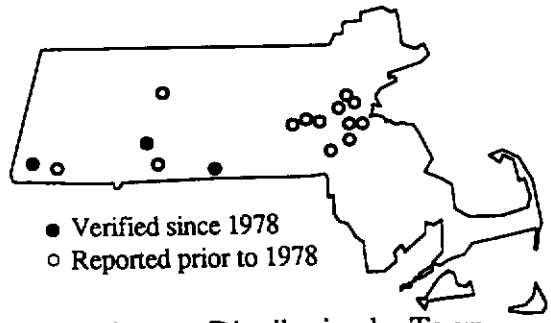
Hitchcock, A.S. Manual of the Grasses of the United States. V.1. Dover Publications, 1971.

Description

Shining Wedge Grass is a slender, 3-8 dm (3/4 - 2 1/2 ft.) tall, tufted perennial in the Grass Family (Poaceae or Gramineae). Its common name comes from the aspect of the culms (stems), which are shiny. Generally, both the dark green blades and the sheathes (lowermost, stem-enveloping portion of the leaf) are hairy. The main blades are 2-5 mm (2/25 - 5/25 in.) wide and 3-10 cm (1 1/5 - 4 in.) long. The sheath of the uppermost leaf is several times longer than the blade. Shining Wedge Grass's spikelets (basic flowering units of grasses) are arranged in a mostly 8-12 cm (3 - 4 3/4 in.) long panicle (an elongate, branched inflorescence). Spikelets are 2.5-4 mm (2/25 - 4/25 in.) long and mature from early to late June. The genus name, *Sphenopholis*, comes from the Greek *sphen* for wedge and *pholis* for scale and refers to the broadly wedge-shaped second glume (one of two specialized, outermost bracts in grasses).



Documented Range of Shining Wedge Grass




Massachusetts Distribution by Town

Range

The documented range of Shining Wedge Grass extends from Massachusetts to southern Ontario, Michigan and Illinois, and south to Missouri, northern Florida and Texas.

Similar Species

Prairie Wedge Grass (*Sphenopholis obtusata*) could be mistaken for Shining Wedge Grass. However, it is much more densely flowered and has a more spike-like inflorescence than Shining Wedge Grass. In addition, the anthers of Prairie Wedge Grass are only 0.3-0.7 mm long (1/75 - 2/75 in.), while those of Shining Wedge Grass range from 1.2-1.6 mm (2/50 - 3/50 in.) long. Finally, unlike Shining Wedge Grass, Prairie Wedge Grass is not a woodland species.

Habitat in Massachusetts

Shining Wedge Grass is a species of dry or moist, and, frequently, rocky woods and hillsides. Habitats in Massachusetts include a fairly steep, rocky, lower slope in a dry, rich forest and Hickory-Hop Hornbeam forests. Associates include Eastern Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*), White Pine (*Pinus strobus*), Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*), Brome Grass (*Bromus pubescens*), Pennsylvania Sedge (*Carex pensylvanica*), Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*), Orange-fruited Horse Gentian (*Triosteum aurantiacum*), and Early Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum dioicium*). Rare Massachusetts species found with Shining Wedge Grass include Yellow Oak (*Quercus muhlenbergii*) and Devil's-bit (*Chamaelirium luteum*). Historical habitats include a dry woods, a wet swale, a wooded pond shore, a rocky hillside and a cold spring bog.

Population Status

Shining Wedge Grass is presently listed as "Threatened" in Massachusetts. There are fourteen historical stations (unverified since 1978) and three current stations. (Since only the county of one historical station is known, just thirteen historical stations appear on the town distribution map.) Shining Wedge Grass is also considered rare in Vermont.