



Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

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Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

Seabeach Needlegrass *Aristida tuberculosa* Nutt.

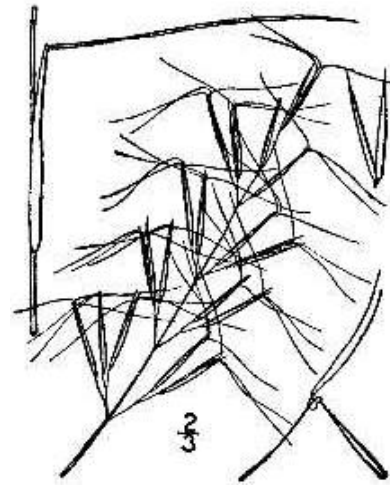
State Status: **Threatened**

Federal Status: **None**

DESCRIPTION: Seabeach Needlegrass is an annual grass of medium height (30-60 cm, 10-25 in.) with a small fibrous root system. It grows in patches, which from a distance have a coppery hue. Plants produce one to several shoots from a central point at ground level. These shoots have few leaves but support several flowering spikes tipped by long awns. In immature plants, the awns stick straight up. When seeds mature in late summer or early fall, the awns turn a pale straw color, coil tightly along the basal portion, and project perpendicularly to the stem. These twisted awns aid in the implantation of the seed.

SIMILAR SPECIES: The perennial Purple Needlegrass (*Aristida purpurascens*, Threatened) is similar in appearance but is darker, having a more purple-brown hue. The inflorescence has a narrower appearance due, in part, to the shorter awns (1.5-2.5 cm versus 2.5 cm in *A. tuberculosa*), which are not coiled at the base. Purple Needlegrass is a rare plant of dry grasslands and is not found in the dunes where Seabeach Needlegrass grows.

RANGE: Seabeach Needlegrass is found along the coast from Massachusetts to Georgia and from Indiana to Minnesota and Iowa.

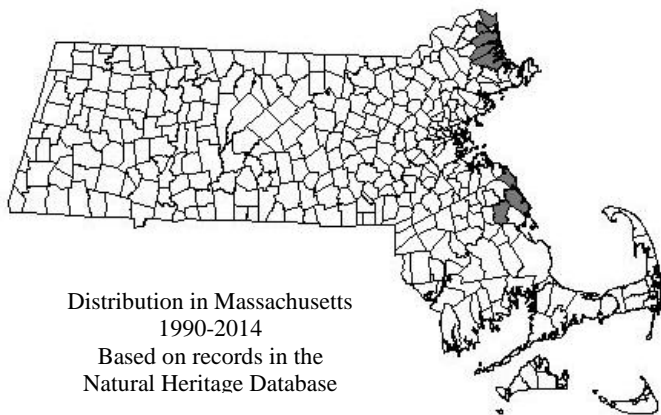


USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database / Britton, N.L., and A. Brown. 1913. *An illustrated flora of the northern United States, Canada and the British Possessions*. 3 vols. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. Vol. 1: 183.

HABITAT IN MASSACHUSETTS: Seabeach Needlegrass is found on stable dunes growing in association with Beach Heather (*Hudsonia tomentosa*). Occasionally it is also found in gravel pits or on sandy roadsides, since this species is somewhat adventive and can colonize disturbed sites.

POPULATION STATUS: Seabeach Needlegrass is listed as Threatened in Massachusetts. It is also considered rare in Connecticut, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Hampshire, North Carolina and Virginia. Threats to this species include heavy recreational use of the dunes which results in destabilization and loss of habitat. Further habitat loss occurs with the succession of the habitat from its early open stage to shrub and pine thickets. For unknown reasons, this species has never been found on the extensive dune systems of Cape Cod and the Islands.

Updated 2015



Distribution in Massachusetts
1990-2014
Based on records in the
Natural Heritage Database

A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

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