



Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

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Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

Rich's Sea-blite *Suaeda maritima* (L.) Dumort. ssp. *richii* (Fernald) Bassett & Crompton

State Status: **None**
Federal Status: **None**

Species Description: Rich's Sea-blite is an annual herbaceous species with succulent, linear, alternate leaves and a prostrate, spreading habit, forming mats up to 0.5m (2.5 ft) wide. The species *Suaeda maritima* is distinguished from others in the same genus by having rounded sepals without keels or hoods, which are all the same length; other species have unequal sepals or sepals with keels and/or hoods. Rich's Sea-blite is distinguished from *S. maritima* ssp. *maritima* (an introduced species) by the size of the seeds, which are 1-1.5mm long in Rich's Sea-blite and 1.5-2mm long for *S. maritima* ssp. *maritima*. In addition, the leaf blades are only 3-15 mm long in Rich's Sea-blite, compared to 10-30 (-50) in *S. maritima* ssp. *maritima*. Although *S. maritima* ssp. *maritima* is frequently prostrate, it also may grow erect.

Distribution and Abundance: In Massachusetts, Rich's Sea-blite has found in Essex, Suffolk, Plymouth and Barnstable Counties, with current populations (observed since 1990) known from Suffolk, Plymouth and

Barnstable Counties. Additional survey is needed to determine if this apparent decrease in the population is real or, if the species has just been under-reported in recent years. Most of the previous records were from Essex County.

Habitat Description: This plant grows in salt marshes and coastal beaches, often near tidal creeks. Sorrie describes its habitat as the "protected side of barrier beaches and islands" and associated with estuarine systems. Associated species include *Suaeda linearis*, *Salicornia virginica*, *S. europaea*, *Spartina alterniflora*, and *Salsola kali*.

Threats: The threats to Rich's Sea-blite are not fully understood, but may include anthropogenic activities including ORV use and changes in the disturbance regime. This species produces large numbers of seeds; however, it still seems to remain as an uncommon species. Climate change may also be a threat as it may bring not only increases in temperature not favorable for this species, but changes in the severity and frequency of coastal storms, which may cause erosion or deposition within this species habitat.

References:

- Gleason, H.A. and A. Cronquist. 1991. *Manual of Vascular Plants of Northeastern United States and Adjacent Canada, Second Edition*. The New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, New York.
- Haines, A. 2011. *Flora Novae-Angliae*. The New England Wild Flower Society. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.



Distribution in Massachusetts
1990-2015
Based on records in
Natural Heritage Database
Map updated 2015

Prepared 2015

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

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

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