

Tall Larkspur (*Delphinium exaltatum*)

Pennsylvania Endangered Plant Species

State Rank: S1 (critically imperiled), Global Rank: G3 (vulnerable)

Identification

Larkspurs have distinctive flowers with four blue petals and one sepal elongated into a slender spur, which gives the plant its name. The leaves are deeply lobed into irregular segments. Our two native larkspurs can often be distinguished by the difference in their height at blooming periods. Tall larkspur blooms in late summer and grows two to six feet, while dwarf larkspur- which blooms in early spring-grows only eight to 30 inches high.

Biology-Natural History

Tall larkspur is an herbaceous perennial member of the Buttercup Family (*Ranunculaceae*). It blooms from July to September. This is another species reaching the northern limit of its range in southern Pennsylvania.

Habitat

In Pennsylvania, tall larkspur grows on dry, open southwest-facing slopes with limestone soils. Its range extends from southern Pennsylvania, west to Ohio, and south to North Carolina, Tennessee and Missouri.



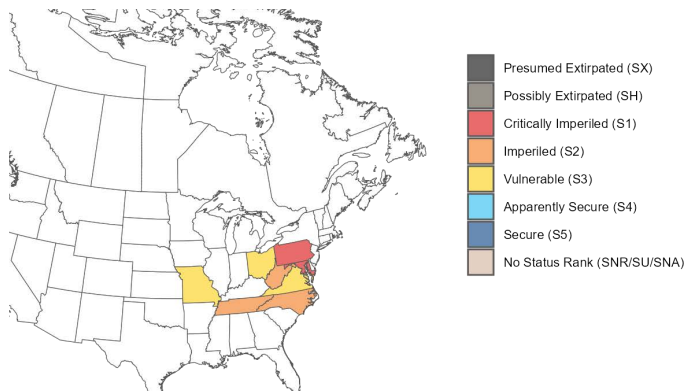
Photo Credit: Carl Keener, Penn State University

Reason for Being Endangered

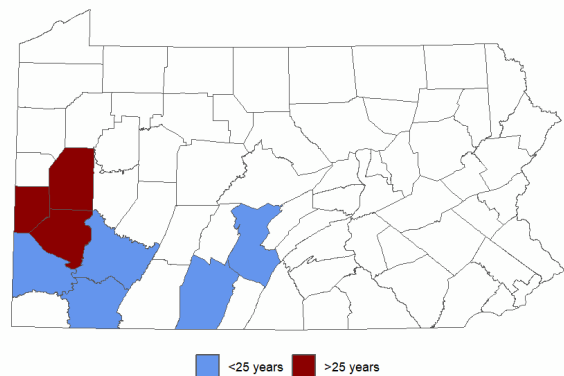
Of the eight historically recorded plant sites, only one has been located. Most museum records do not contain specific directions, so extensive surveys are needed to search all possible sites. Two additional locations have been found by searching suitable habitat. The three known tall larkspur populations are threatened by roadside herbicide spray, road expansion and limestone quarrying. Tall larkspur is considered a species of concern throughout its natural range and is listed as Endangered in Pennsylvania, Missouri, North Carolina and Tennessee.

North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe 2025



Tall Larkspur (*Delphinium exaltatum*)



Management Practices

Surveys of historically known locations must be continued. Owners of known sites should be encouraged to protect the plants. Penn DOT and other environmental assessments will help avoid impacts from road construction. In February 1990 tall larkspur was classified as a candidate for federal listing by the USF&WS.

References:

- NatureServe. 2025. NatureServe Explorer [web application] NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available at <https://explorer.natureserve.org> (Accessed: May 8, 2025)

