

Bull Sedge

Carex bullata

Description

Bull sedge is a grass-like plant that forms colonies. The aerial stems are triangular in cross-section, purple-tinged near the base, and stand 1 to 3¼ feet (3-10 dm) tall. The leaves have linear, elongated blades that are smooth, light green, and about 1/8 inch (2-4 mm) wide. The flowers are unisexual, grouped in 1 to 3 male spikes at the top of the stem and 1 or 2 bur-like female spikes below. The female spike consist of individual inflated sac-like structures, or perigynia, which are about 3/8 inch (6 to 10 mm) long, arranged around the spike into 8 to 12 vertical rows, and contain the triangular fruit.

Distribution & Habitat

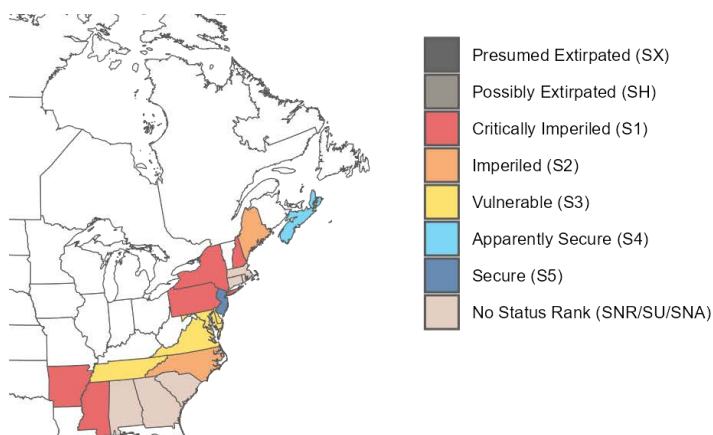
Bull sedge has a distribution centered mainly on the coastal plain from Newfoundland south and west into Arkansas. In Pennsylvania, this species occurs on a western border of its range and has been documented historically in a few eastern counties. It grows in swamps, seepages, boggy wetlands and along streamlets.



Photo source: John Kunsman (PNHP)

North American State/Province Conservation Status

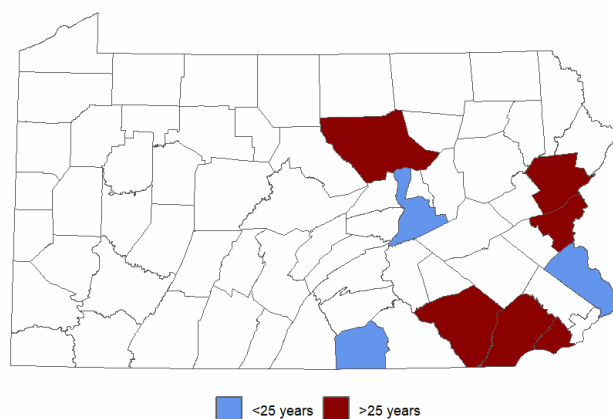
Map by NatureServe 2025



Current State Status

The PA Biological Survey (PABS) considers bull sedge to be a species of special concern, based on the very few occurrences that have been recently confirmed and its wetland habitat. It has a PA legal rarity status and a PABS suggested rarity status of Endangered. Fewer than 5 populations are currently known from the state.

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Conservation Considerations

The viability of populations of bull sedge and its habitat may be enhanced by creating buffers around wetlands, controlling invasive species, and protecting the natural hydrology surrounding wetlands.

NatureServe conservation status ranks

G5 – Globally secure; S1 – Critically imperiled in Pennsylvania

References

- NatureServe. 2025. NatureServe Explorer [web application] NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available at <https://explorer.natureserve.org> (Accessed: May 8, 2025)
- Rhoads, A.F. and T.A. Block. 2007. The Plants of Pennsylvania: An Illustrated Manual. 2nd edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.