

Northeastern Bulrush (*Scirpus ancistrochaetus*)

Plant Species of Concern
State Rank: S3, Global Rank: G3

Identification

Northeastern bulrush is a tall sedge with short thick underground rhizomes from where the leaves emerge in May. Superficially, sedges seem to be “grass like” plants; however, there are many differences between sedges and grasses. With practice, the two families are easily distinguished from each other. Leaves are three angled, narrow, green to whitish or brown, and have basal sheaths. Flowers are individually difficult to see without magnification. The grouping of flowers or the inflorescences are more obvious, sometimes resembling the exploding of a fire work. The branches holding the inflorescence droop with age. The fruits, or achenes in this case, are very small, about 1/30 of an inch across.

Habitat

Populations of northeastern bulrush are recorded from Quebec south to West Virginia. Throughout its range including in Pennsylvania, it is found growing on the edges of seasonal pools, wet depressions, beaver ponds, wetlands, and small ponds.

Status

Only 50-60 populations exist throughout its entire range. Pennsylvania has the largest number of occurrences. The decline of this species is attributed to multiple threats: degradation of habitat from road construction and upland runoff, destruction by off road vehicles, and conversion of land for other uses.

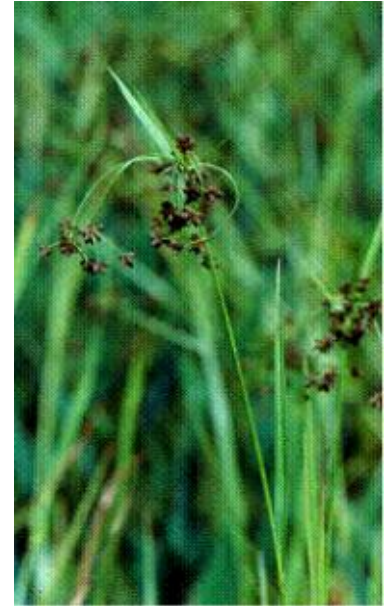
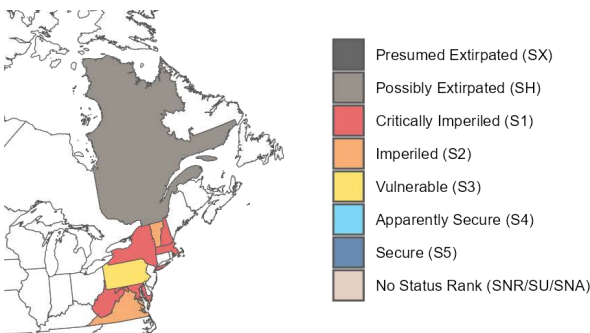
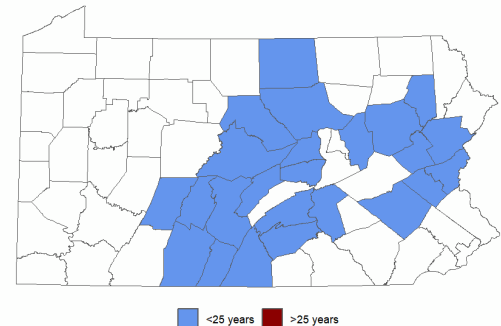


photo source: PNHP

North American State/Province Conservation Status
Map by NatureServe 2025



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Conservation

Slight variations in the natural fluctuation in the water level can harm this plant. Therefore, activities that impact the water table and degrade the plant's habitat such as development, ATV use, agriculture, quarrying, and dredging have been known to destroy several historic locations. Other potential threats to the species include deer browsing, fire, and natural succession.

Management of this species may include enhanced protection from nearby road construction, the implantation of practices to alleviate pollution from upland runoff, and continued protection of current sites from development. Surveys of potential habitat for new populations have been proven to be successful and should be continued. Habitat restoration projects are possible for sites that have suffered degradation. The northeastern bulrush became the second plant in Pennsylvania to be listed as a federally endangered species. Because of this special status, activities that pose a direct harm to the species would be subject to regulation by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

References

- NatureServe. 2025. NatureServe Explorer [web application] NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available at <https://explorer.natureserve.org> (Accessed: May 8, 2025) Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program. 2025.
- Rhoads, A.F. and W.M. Klein, Jr. 1993. The Vascular Flora of Pennsylvania: Annotated Checklist and Atlas. American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.
- Rhoads, A.F. and T. A. Block. 2000. The Plants of Pennsylvania: An Illustrated Manual. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia