

Water Bulrush

Schoenoplectus subterminalis

Description

Water Bulrush is a grass-like plant that forms patches in shallow water due to its wide-spreading underground stems, or rhizomes. The plant may be completely submersed when in a vegetative state, and then has very narrow linear leaves that are mainly attached near the base of the plant and are extremely limp when removed from the water. If and when the plant flowers and fruits, an erect aerial stem is produced that may grow 1-3 feet (to 1 m) in height and protrudes out of the water. The flowers, appearing from July to September, are minute and are grouped in a single cluster that is about 3/8 inch (7-12 mm) in length that is located just below what appears to be the tip of the stem (actually the tip of an erect leaf that subtends the tip of the stem). The individual fruit is brownish, three-sided at maturity, about 1/8 inch (3 mm) in length, has 6 slender bristles attached at the base, and a prominent beak at the tip.

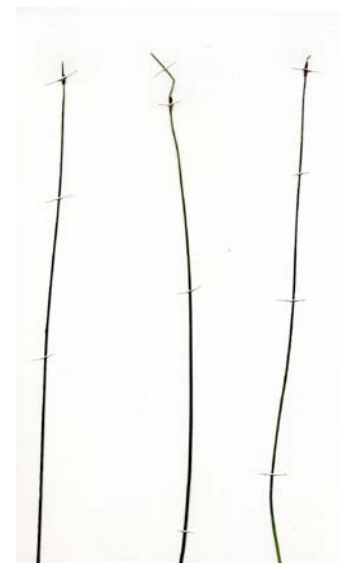


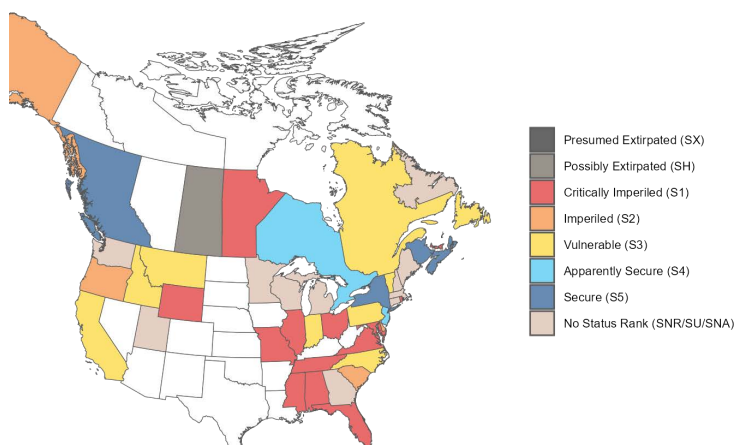
Photo source: PNHP

Distribution & Habitat

Water Bulrush has a transcontinental range across the cooler regions of North America. In Pennsylvania, it is considered a northerly species and has been documented historically in mostly the northeastern counties. It grows in lakes, ponds, and slow-moving streams.

North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe 2025



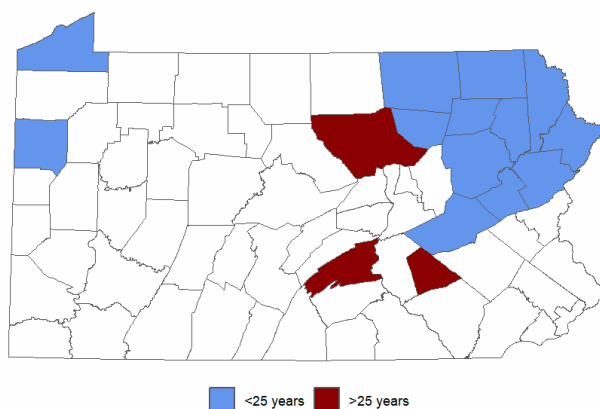
Conservation Considerations

The viability of populations of Water Bulrush and its habitat may be enhanced by creating buffers and protecting the natural hydrology around wetlands, controlling invasive species, and avoiding the indiscriminate use of aquatic herbicides.

Current State Status

The PA Biological Survey (PABS) considers Water Bulrush to be a species of special concern, based on the limited locations recently confirmed and the wetland habitat. It does not have a PA legal rarity status, but has been assigned a PABS suggested rarity status of Rare.

Water Bulrush (*Schoenoplectus subterminalis*)



NatureServe conservation status ranks

G5 – Globally secure; **S3** – Vulnerable in Pennsylvania

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. American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Rhoads, A.F. and T.A. Block. 2007. The Plants of Pennsylvania: An Illustrated Manual. 2nd edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

