

Dragon's Mouth (*Arethusa bulbosa*)

Pennsylvania Endangered Plant Species

State Rank: S1 (critically imperiled), Global Rank: G5 (secure)

Identification

The dragon's mouth is a magenta-pink orchid with flowers one to two inches long. The lower lip is purple-spotted and crested with yellow hairs. The flower stalk, 2 to 15 inches, arises from a bulb loosely rooted among mosses. A single, grasslike leaf develops after the plant blooms.

Biology-Natural History

Dragon's mouth, an herbaceous perennial, is a member of the Orchid Family (*Orchidaceae*). Flowers bloom in May and June. It is rare throughout its range. There are only two species of *Arethusa* in the world, ours and one in Japan.

Habitat

Dragon's mouth grows in open, sunny sphagnum moss bogs and swampy meadows. This species ranges from Newfoundland to Minnesota, south to Delaware, Maryland and northern Indiana, and in the mountains to South Carolina, but it is apparently absent from large portions of this range.

Reasons for Being Endangered

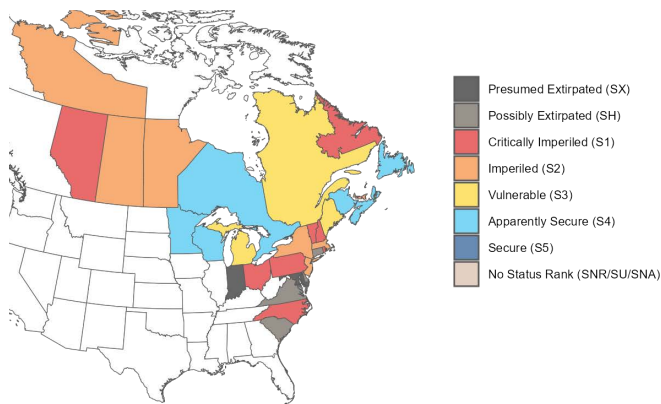
Only three of 26 historical populations in Pennsylvania can still be found. One population was destroyed when its wetland habitat was inundated during the creation of Pymatuning Reservoir. Eight populations have not been relocated although suitable habitat still remains at the sites. It is suspected that these plants were stolen. Collection, deer browsing, and habitat destruction contribute to the decline of this beautiful orchid.



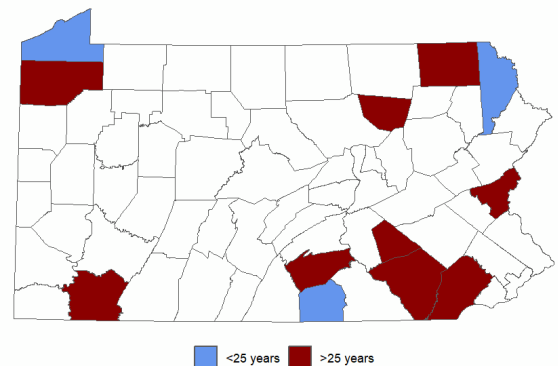
Photo Credit: Paul Wiegman, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe 2025



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Management Practices

One population is in a privately owned natural area. The site is monitored by the Presque Isle Audubon Society and the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania. Habitat at a second site is protected by current state regulations. Plants from the third site located on State Forest land will be included in the Public Wild Plant Sanctuary Network. State regulations prohibit the taking of any plant from State Forests. In addition, the Wild Resource Conservation Act sets fines for removal of Endangered and Threatened plant species, without landowner permission, at \$100 per plant.

References:

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



Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program

Fact Sheet adapted from: Felbaum, Mitchell, et al. Endangered and Threatened Species of Pennsylvania. Harrisburg, PA: Wild Resource Conservation Fund, 1995.

