



Running Buffalo Clover (*Trifolium stoloniferum*)

Common Name

Running Buffalo Clover

Scientific Name

Trifolium stoloniferum

Status

Running buffalo clover is listed as an **Endangered** species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



(Photo by Bill Roody)

West Virginia Status

This species was thought to be extinct from West Virginia, and possibly its entire range, until it was rediscovered in the New River Gorge in 1983. It is now known from 35 sites within West Virginia; however, three of the sites are pre-1945, and one hasn't been seen since 1988. Running buffalo clover currently inhabits Barbour, Brooke, Fayette, Pendleton, Pocahontas, Randolph and Tucker counties. Past populations were known from Monongalia, Preston and Webster counties. A population at Crouch Knob in Randolph County is the largest in the world.

Description

Running buffalo clover is a perennial species, appearing each spring at the same site and dying off in late summer/early fall. This plant is called running buffalo clover because of the stolons, or runners, that extend from the base of erect stems. These stolons are capable of rooting and expanding the size of small clumps of clover into larger ones. The flower

of this clover, which is on a stem with a pair of leaflets (unlike other clovers), is white tinged with purple. It flowers from May through July. While many clovers have arrow-shaped "watermarks" on their leaves, running buffalo clover lacks these marks. This species often appears to be more robust than other white clovers. This plant often grows in small clumps along old roads, skid rows, old game trails, and other disturbed areas. A literature search was conducted in 1989 for references to elk, deer, bison, Indian trails, salt licks, and clover. A map of bison trails evolved from this research. Hoping to find a connection between game trails and running buffalo clover sites, botanists scoured the state surveying areas along major game trails for the clover. A few sites for the clover were found along or near past game trails.

Habitat

The suspected distribution of running buffalo includes the states of West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas and Arkansas. To date the species has not been relocated in Illinois, Kansas and Arkansas. In Missouri, running buffalo clover was found growing on a load of topsoil, but the source of the topsoil could not be found. Running buffalo clover is most frequently found in habitats with filtered sunlight that have had some kind of recent disturbance. Range-wide this clover's habitats include cemeteries, Indian mounds, dooryards, historical homesites, mowed paths, jeep trails, grazed ravines and woodlots. In West Virginia running buffalo clover has been found on jeep trails, old logging roads, skid roads, and wooded thickets.

Factors

The greatest threats to this species appear to be major disturbances, such as road construction, that completely destroy the clover's habitat, and the slow maturation of the habitat through succession. It is hard to determine what can threaten a species which needs disturbance to survive.

Threats and Prospects

Although the number of sites for this species is increasing, relatively little is known regarding the



basic biology of running buffalo clover. More work needs to be done to determine its historic distribution, ecology, and the level of disturbance this species can tolerate. Factors affecting seed germination, such as the role of herbivores, also need to be determined. Despite the increase in the number of populations, running buffalo clover is still listed as an endangered species, and will remain so until more is known about this unique clover.