

WESTERN PRAIRIE FRINGED ORCHID (*Platanthera praeclara*)**Description**

The western prairie fringed orchid (orchid) is a native perennial forb with a single stout stem growing 1-3 feet tall. It has long smooth leaves with parallel venation, 4-8 inches long and 1 inch wide at the base, tapering toward the tip. Up to 40 single flowers are arranged in a spike at the top of the stalk. The individual flowers are creamy to greenish white and about one inch long. Like other orchids, they have 3 colored sepals and 3 petals, the three sepals forming the upper part of the flower. The two lateral petals look alike and are about 1/4 inch long. The lower petal forms a lip that is divided into three sections; the middle one is the longest (up to 3/4 inch) and forms a landing pad for the hawkmoth that pollinate it. All three sections of the middle petal are deeply lobed, giving it the fringed look from which its name comes. The orchid flowers from mid June through mid July and has a faint sweet scent. It forms a fruit that is a three-angled capsule with many spindle-shaped seeds.

Distribution

The western prairie fringed orchid is known to occur at 64 sites in 15 counties in eastern Nebraska, the central Platte Valley and the Sandhills. In 1998 and 1999, the USFWS estimated that approximately 1,374 orchid plants existed at the 64 sites found in Nebraska. Nationally, it is found scattered in Oklahoma, Nebraska and northward to Manitoba.

Habitat

This orchid is found in wet to moist soils with full sunlight in swales in tallgrass prairie, and on wet meadows. They are usually in calcareous silt loam or sub irrigated sandy loam prairies.

Status

Global: G3-Vulnerable. Federally Threatened. State Threatened. Nebraska: S3-Vulnerable.

All populations in Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma have fewer than 50 individuals. The species may have been extirpated in South Dakota. Conversion of habitat for crop production, grazing, intensive haying, drainage, and indiscriminate herbicide use, fire protection and the general decline of native prairie areas have contributed to the decline of the western prairie fringed orchid.

Management

Conservation measures for this species include recognition of the species, acquisition of land on which the orchid grows, and the management of populations on private land. On both public and private land, care should be taken to reduce disturbances to the plants' habitat. Livestock overgrazing, intensive hay mowing, herbicide use near populations, and other practices detrimental to native prairie should be avoided. Ditching of wet meadows and the introduction of exotic forage plants would also be detrimental to the western prairie fringed orchid.

More Information

<http://ecos.fws.gov/speciesProfile/profile/speciesProfile.action?sPCODE=Q2YD>