



Northeastern Bulrush (*Scirpus ancistrochaetus*)

Common Name

Northeastern Bulrush

Scientific Name

Scirpus ancistrochaetus

Status

Northeastern bulrush is listed by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service as federally **Endangered**.



(WVDNR Photo)

West Virginia Status

This bulrush is known to grow at only in three sites in West Virginia, two of which are just one mile from each other. There are approximately thirty additional sites for this species in the U.S.

Description

Northeastern bulrush is a tall, slender, perennial plant with many long, narrow leaves. It grows 80 to 120 cm high, and sometimes has at its top drooping clusters of spikelets which contain very small flowers. Some of the plants, however, may not have these groups of flowers and will not produce seeds. These plants sometimes reproduce by growing new stems from their roots or from nodes in their stems when they are knocked over.

Habitat

Northeastern bulrush is a member of the sedge family and grows in or at the edge of ponds and other small expanses of standing water whose levels fluctuate through the year. It can survive these periodic changes in water level but will decline if the

water level permanently drops because it needs to be in the water or beside water. In West Virginia the species grows in four small sinkhole ponds on two private property locations in Berkeley County, and in a sinkhole pond in Hardy County. As can be guessed from the name, Northeastern bulrush occurs only in the Northeast of the United States. It is located in small, hilly areas of New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Virginia. The bulrush has been found previously in New York, but the population of plants is no longer there.

Factors

Because Northeastern bulrush grows directly in ponds, sinkholes, and other wetlands or at their edges, it is directly affected by changes in water quality and by many forms of water pollution. Deer sometimes eat and trample the plants where they grow in shallow water and at the edges of the wet areas. Off road vehicle damage to these areas during dry periods has increased in recent years. If too many other types of plants, especially trees, grow up close to the wet areas where the bulrush occurs, it will have less space in which to grow and possibly will have less sunlight, nutrients, and water. Conversely, having too few plant types around may leave the bulrush unprotected from other disturbances. Permanent flooding of the areas where Northeastern bulrush grows is sometimes caused by beaver dams or by the removal of many trees from around the wet area.

Threats and Prospects

Several of the locations where Northeastern bulrush grows are on state-owned or state-controlled land. These areas can be protected from damage to a larger extent than those owned by private citizens or groups. Populations of the bulrush on private land are threatened by agricultural or building projects which involve filling the ponds with soil or draining them. Efforts are currently underway to protect Northeastern bulrush wherever it occurs and to search likely habitat for new populations. The threats to each known population are being examined, and the cooperation and support of private landowners and public land managers is being sought.