

# Slender Mountain-ricegrass

## *Oryzopsis (Piptatherum) pungens*

### Description

Slender Mountain-ricegrass is a perennial grass that grows in a tufted clump and produces erect stems that may reach 18 inches (ca 0.5 m) in height. The leaves are alternately arranged, consisting of a basal sheath portion that envelopes the stem and an extremely narrow, flattened or inrolled, and untoothed blade that is up to 1 foot (0.3 m) in length, about 1/16 inch (2 mm) in width, and pointed at the tip. The minute flowers, appearing primarily in May and June (but sometimes sporadically later in the year), occur in a relatively short and few-branched cluster, or inflorescence, at the tip of the stem. The inflorescence contains many individual spikelets about 1/8 inch (3-4 mm) in length, with each including a single flower and later a single fruit. The tip of the spikelet usually has a tiny hair-like projection, or awn, which is 1/16 inch (1-2 mm) in length, but is rather delicate and often breaks off. In summer, well after the fruits have fallen, the species may often be identified by the persistence of the inflorescence, which turns pale brown and has a short, few-branched appearance.



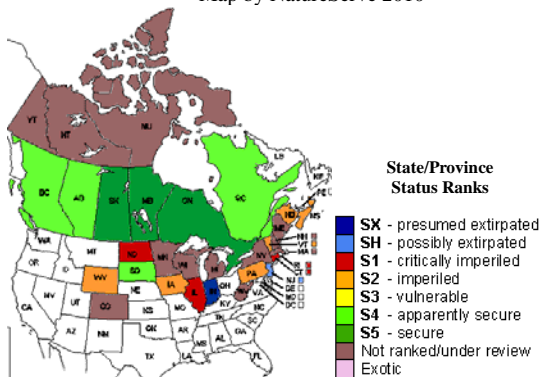
Photo source: John Kunsman (PNHP)

### Distribution & Habitat

Slender Mountain-ricegrass has a transcontinental range across the cooler regions of North America. In Pennsylvania, it represents a northerly species and has been documented historically in a few northeastern counties. It grows in well-drained, sandy habitats that receive considerable sun, such as rocky open woods, bedrock outcrops, heath barrens, balds, and mountain summits.

### North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe 2010

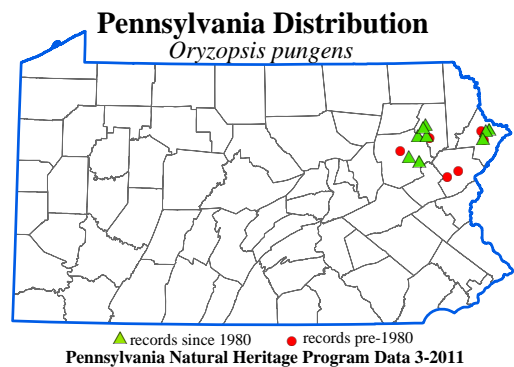


### Current State Status

The PA Biological Survey (PABS) considers Slender Mountain-ricegrass to be a species of special concern, based on the limited number of locations recently confirmed, the usually small population sizes, and the specialized habitat. It has a PA legal rarity status and a PABS suggested rarity status of Endangered.

### Conservation Considerations

Most populations of Slender Mountain-ricegrass in Pennsylvania are situated in remote areas where the habitat is likely to be kept in a natural state. Active management, such as the use of prescribed fire, may be beneficial in maintaining these areas or in creating additional habitat.



### NatureServe conservation status ranks

G5 – Globally secure; S2 – Imperiled in Pennsylvania

### References

- NatureServe. 2011. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.1. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>.
- Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program. 2011.
- 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. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

