

# Schweinitz's sunflower

## *Helianthus schweinitzii*



*Schweinitz's sunflower*; USFWS

**Status:** Endangered

**Description:** Schweinitz's sunflower is a perennial that regularly grows approximately 6½ feet tall (though it can be shorter if young or injured) and can occasionally reach heights of 16 feet. It has thickened roots that are specially designed to store starch. The stem is purple, and the upper third bears secondary branches at 45-degree angles. The leaves are arranged in pairs on the lower part of the stem but usually occur singly on the upper part. Leaves grow out from the stem at a right angle, and the tips of the leaves tend to droop. The leaves are thick and stiff, with a rough upper surface. They have broad spiny hairs that are directed toward the tip, and soft white hairs cover the underside. The plant produces small yellow flowers. Schweinitz's sunflower blooms from late August until frost. It's able to colonize through the dispersal of

seeds that readily germinate without a dormant period. In good conditions, it can grow 3 to 6 feet in a year and can live for decades.

**Habitat:** It occurs in full to partial sun and is found in areas with poor soils, such as thin clays that vary from wet to dry. This preference for poor soil helps minimize competition from other species.

**Range:** Piedmont region of North and South Carolina

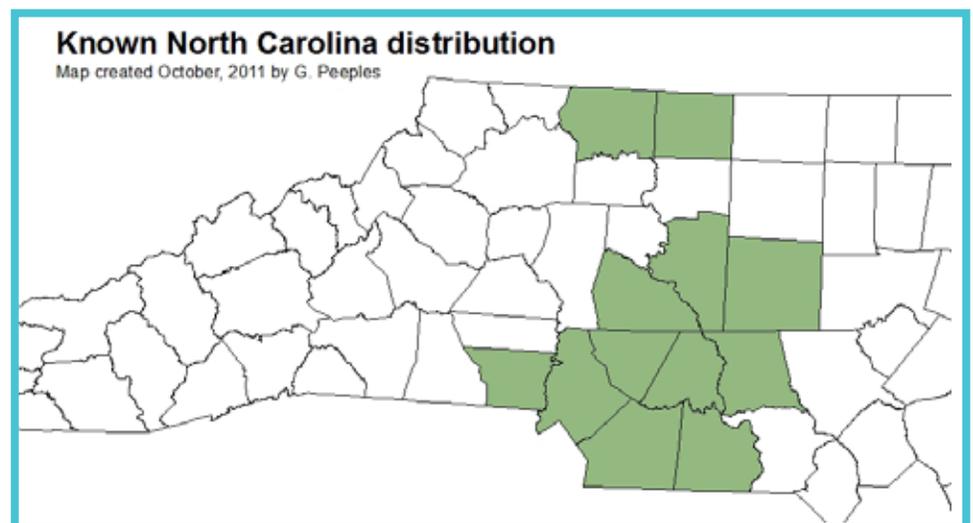
**Listing:** Endangered, May 7, 1999. 56 FR 21087 21091

**Critical habitat:** None designated

**Threats:** Habitat destruction, fire suppression, alteration of native habitat, roadside and utility rightofway maintenance, industrial development, mining, encroachment by exotic species, and highway construction and improvement have all contributed to the decline of Schweinitz's sunflower. This species occurs in many rapidly developing areas within the piedmont region of North and South Carolina. As these areas develop, Schweinitz's sunflower loses habitat.

**Why should we be concerned about the loss of species?** Extinction is a natural process that has been occurring since long before the appearance of humans. Normally, new species develop through a process known as speciation, at about the same rate other species become extinct. However, because of air and water pollution, forest clearing, loss of wetlands, and other human-induced environmental changes, extinctions are now occurring at a rate that far exceeds the speciation rate.

All living things are part of a complex and interconnected network. We depend on the diversity of plant and animal life for our recreation, nourishment, many of our lifesaving medicines, and the ecological functions they provide. One-quarter of all the prescriptions written in the United States today contain chemicals that were originally discovered in plants and animals. Industry and agriculture are increasingly making use of wild plants, seeking out the remaining wild strain of many common crops, such as wheat and corn, to produce new hybrids that are more resistant to disease, pests, and marginal climatic conditions. Our food crops depend on insects and other animals for pollination. Healthy forests



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

clean the air and provide oxygen for us to breathe. Wetlands clean water and help minimize the impacts of floods. These services are the foundation of life and depend on a diversity of plants and animals working in concert. Each time a species disappears, we lose not only those benefits we know it provided but other benefits that we have yet to realize.

### **What you can do to help**

Tread lightly and stay on designated trails.

Visit arboretums, botanical gardens, and parks and learn all you can about endangered plants and the causes of their declines.

Don't collect or buy plants collected from wild populations.

Participate in the protection of our remaining wild lands and the restoration of damaged ecosystems.

Become involved in local land-use planning efforts to help protect natural areas

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