

Virginia Sneezeweed

Helenium virginicum

Description

The Virginia sneezeweed was first discovered in 1936. It is a rare perennial wildflower found only in Virginia. This herbaceous plant has yellow flowers and can reach a height of 3.5 feet.

Life History

This wetland plant is found on the shores of naturally-occurring shallow, seasonally flooded limestone ponds (less than 0.1 to 8 acres in size) along the western edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains in the Shenandoah Valley. This plant inhabits poorly drained, acidic, silty loam soils, that are generally flooded from January to July. Flowering occurs from July through November after the plant is one year old. It appears that the primary insect pollinators for this species are bees, wasps, butterflies, and hoverflies. Seeds are dispersed in late fall and winter and germination occurs in late summer or early fall of the following year if conditions are suitable. This plant can tolerate disturbance such as mowing and grazing. However, the effects of soil compaction and increased nutrient loads related to cattle grazing within the wetlands needs further study. It cannot tolerate shade or long periods of flooding. Each year, Virginia sneezeweed populations vary greatly due to water level fluctuations.

Conservation

The Virginia sneezeweed was federally listed as a threatened species on December 3, 1998. This plant is threatened by residential development, off-road vehicle use, incompatible agriculture practices, logging, filling and ditching of wetlands, and other disruptions of its habitat and the hydrology that maintains it.

What you can do to help

Landowners can protect ponds by following best management practices that maintain or enhance water quality and quantity in these fragile wetland communities. Land uses in surrounding uplands should be carefully evaluated to avoid hydrologic changes and increased nutrient inputs to ponds. If you find a plant that appears to be the Virginia sneezeweed, take note of the location and photograph the plant, if possible. Please do not remove the plant!

Contact one of the following agencies for assistance:

Virginia Department of Agriculture
and Consumer Services
Office of Plant Protection
P.O. Box 1163
Richmond, Virginia 23209
804/786 3515

Virginia Department of
Conservation and Recreation
Division of Natural Heritage
217 Governor Street, 3rd Floor
Richmond, Virginia 23219
804/786 7951

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Virginia Field Office
6669 Short Lane
Gloucester, Virginia 23061
804/693 6694

References

Johnson, M.F. and D.M. Porter.
Virginia sneezeweed. 1991. Pages
145-146 in K. Terwilliger, ed.
Virginia's Endangered Species,
Proceeding of a Symposium.
McDonald and Woodward Publishing
Company, Blacksburg, Virginia.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1998.
Endangered and threatened wildlife
and plants; Determination of



dcervirginia.gov

threatened status for Virginia sneezeweed (*Helenium virginicum*), a plant from the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Federal Register 63(212):59239-59244.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
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6669 Short Lane
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804/693 6694

Federal Relay Service
for the deaf and hard-of-hearing
1 800/877 8339

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
1 800/344 WILD
<http://www.fws.gov>

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