

BRITTON'S BEARGRASS
Nolina brittoniana



Above: Photo of Britton's Beargrass pods.
Photo courtesy of Shirley Denton.

Left: Photo of Britton's Beargrass plant. Photo
courtesy of Kevin Erwin.

FAMILY: Agavaceae (Agave family)

STATUS: Endangered (*Federal Register*, April 27, 1993)

DESCRIPTION AND REPRODUCTION: This clump-forming perennial grows from a short, thick, fleshy, bulblike rootstock. The leaves are 1 to 2 meters (1 to 2 yards) long and 6 to 13 millimeters wide, forming a rosette. The youngest leaves are upright, while the oldest lay nearly flat on the ground. In April, the usually solitary flowering stem grows at least 2 meters (2 yards) high from the rosette. The inflorescence is a panicle with about six branches. When in bloom, these branches are covered with small white six-parted flowers (Kral 1983, Wunderlin et al. 1980). Individual plants appear to usually have all male or all female flowers, although males have sometimes been observed to begin developing fruit (Evans *et al.* 1998). This plant is not difficult to propagate because the plants bear abundant seeds which are easily germinated. Several native plant nurseries are producing this species for sale.

RANGE AND POPULATION LEVEL: The range of *Nolina brittoniana* is from the south end of Lake Wales Ridge in Highlands County north to Marion County and northern Lake County. An isolated locality has been reported from Hernando County, north of Tampa. On the Lake Wales Ridge, it occurs in both Highlands and Polk Counties in most of the tracts that are targeted for acquisition by the state or by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It may still occur in western Orange County and in the northwest corner of Osceola County where specimens were collected in 1958 but remaining habitat is being rapidly destroyed. In Lake County, it occurs in the remnants of high pine on hills west of Lake Apopka near Clermont. It was recently discovered at a site in Ocala National Forest.

HABITAT: *Nolina brittoniana* occurs in scrub, high pine, and even occasionally in hammocks (Christman 1988) and sandhill (Wunderlin *et al.* 1980). This species is a generalist for xeric soils and therefore has relatively unfragmented distribution of presettlement habitat; however, maybe because of its wide range of population sizes and dioecious breeding system, there are discernable geographic patterns in genetic statistics (Evans *et al.* 1998).

REASONS FOR CURRENT STATUS: Loss of habitat to agricultural and residential development is threatening this species. Sand pine scrub in central Florida was limited in extent even before at least 85 percent of it was converted to citrus groves or residential developments. This species appears to be locally abundant in intact vegetation. Conservation land acquisition underway by the state of Florida and by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service should adequately conserve this species in Highlands and Polk Counties. Current acquisition plans may not adequately protect it in outlying portions of its range (such as Lake County).

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION: Twelve of 22 known sites for Britton's beargrass on the Lake Wales Ridge (Highlands and Polk Counties) are currently under public ownership; land acquisition for many of the remaining sites is ongoing (Schultz *et al.* 1999). Flowering is greatest during the first year post-fire (Menges *et al.* 1996), with dramatic reductions in flowering over subsequent years. The flowering reduction results in decreased seed production and probably limits recruitment (Evans *et al.* 1998).

In biological preserves, Britton's beargrass probably requires less special management or demographic monitoring than some other endangered plants. It is easily propagated from seed and is available in the nursery trade (Association of Florida Native Nurseries 1995).

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