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Conserving South Carolina's At-Risk Species:

Species facing threats to their survival

Bog spicebush

(*Lindera subcoriacea*)



Bog spicebush flowers / Photo credit: Will Cook



Bog spicebush fruits / Photo credit: U.S. Forest Service

Description

Bog spicebush is a multi-stemmed, erect, deciduous shrub, usually 1-2 m in height (occasionally up to 4 m) with leaves that are bluish-green above and pale green and hairy below. Flowers of the Bog spicebush are small and yellow and appear in clusters of 3-4. Fruit is a vivid-red drupe. The species is less aromatic than Common spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) but, when crushed or bruised, the stem and leaves have a definitive piney-lemon smell. Leaves of Bog spicebush are also thicker than Common spicebush with whiter undersides. Bog spicebush flowers in early spring before the leaves appear. Fruits mature in late summer.

Range

Although the species was first described in 1983, its historic range is still poorly understood. It is currently known to occur from southeastern Virginia to Florida and west to Louisiana, almost exclusively on the Atlantic and Gulf Coastal Plains, but occupies a relatively narrow ecological niche with spotty distribution throughout the range. In South Carolina, the species is known to occur in Aiken, Barnwell, and Richland Counties.

Habitat

Bog spicebush inhabits permanently moist to wet, shrub-dominated seepage wetlands ("bogs" or "pocosins"). On the Gulf Coastal Plain of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, such wetlands occur on level to slightly sloping terrain and have been termed pitcher plant bogs or quaking bogs. Dominant plant species include sphagnum moss, sedges, grasses, pitcher plants, and diverse shrubs and herbs. Bog spicebush also inhabits hillside seepage bogs and bayheads, which are shrub-dominated wetlands on slight to moderate slopes. In the Sandhills region of North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia, Bog spicebush occurs in streamhead pocosins, shrub-and-tree-dominated wetlands that border headwater streams draining the variously sloping hills.

Status

There are currently over 100 occurrences, but most of them are very small populations located on sites that may require active management for the plants to persist. The species is clonal, and most sites have only one to five genetic individuals. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was petitioned to list the species in April 2010 and in September 2011, issued a 90-day finding that the petition presented sub-

stantial scientific or commercial information indicating that listing may be warranted. The species is currently under review.

Threats

The general lack of fires in pocosin and seepage bog habitats due to continued development of surrounding longleaf pine/wiregrass uplands has placed Bog spicebush under increased stress from competing shrubs and trees. Other known or perceived threats include siltation of streamheads from various land management activities. Impacts from Red Bay Blight have also been documented.

Management/Protection Needs

Key stewardship needs for bog spicebush include (1) restoring fire to the communities in which it occurs, using winter, fuel-reduction burns and growing season burns where appropriate, (2) protecting and/or restoring the hydrologic conditions which support the species, and (3) monitoring extant subpopulations for responses to current land management practices.

References

Center for Biological Diversity - Southeast Aquatic Species Petition, April 2010.

NatureServe. 2015. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.1. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available <http://explorer.natureserve.org>. (Accessed: August 30, 2016).

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