

Manitoba's Species At Risk

Threatened



Any native Manitoba species likely to become endangered or at risk due to low or declining numbers in Manitoba if the factors affecting it don't improve. Threatened species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

Western silvery aster

Aster sericeus

Western silvery aster (*Aster sericeus*) is a provincially and nationally Threatened wildflower, occurring in Manitoba, Ontario and 21 American states. It is a distinctive, late-summer herbaceous perennial, growing to a height of 30 to 70 cm (12 to 28 inches).

Plants are characterized by several sparsely branched, brittle stems arising from a swollen woody rootstock. The lance-shaped leaves are densely covered with silky hair, giving them a silvery appearance. Most lower leaves die and fall off by the time flowering occurs. Flowers are arranged in composite, or daisy-like, flowering heads roughly 2.5 cm (1 inch) across, with violet to pink ray flowers surrounding the central, yellowy-brown to rose disc flowers.

Habitat

Western silvery aster can be found in dry prairies, fields and openings in bur oak/trembling aspen woodlands. Sites are usually south or west-facing, and their soils are often coarse-textured (gravelly and/or sandy), calcareous (calcium-rich, or alkaline) and well to moderately-well drained. Western silvery aster is most abundant when growing in relatively undisturbed grasslands, but plants can be found in disturbed sites such as roadside ditches and adjacent to gravel pits.

Life History

Western silvery aster is a perennial, surviving from one year to the next as an underground woody rootstock. Flowers appear from early August to mid-September, and are pollinated by bees and other insects. Seeds are mature three to four weeks after pollination, and are spread by wind. Plants

also reproduce vegetatively, through the horizontal growth of rhizomes. The buds from which next year's shoots will arise are formed underground by mid-September.

Distribution

Western silvery aster is found in central North America, from Manitoba south to Texas. In Canada, Western silvery aster is found only in southeastern Manitoba and in the Rainy River area of northwestern Ontario. Most of Manitoba's Western silvery aster plants are found in three areas: Birds Hill Provincial Park and vicinity, Carlowrie and between Gardenton and the Manitoba-Minnesota border. Additional plants can be found near Beausejour, Grunthal and Zhoda.

Status

The Manitoba Conservation Data Centre considers the Western silvery aster to be provincially rare (S2). While also considered very rare in Ontario and in many American states, NatureServe considers the species to be secure (G5) overall. Western silvery aster populations are threatened by gravel extraction, the encroachment of woody species into prairie openings, invasion by non-native plants and pasture enhancement. Urbanization and gravel extraction have resulted in the apparent destruction of some populations. Right-of-way maintenance activities can negatively affect roadside populations. The haying of grasslands in late summer can impact the species if flowering heads are removed before seed set. Insect predation and drought can also negatively affect reproduction.



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Cool Facts

In some references, the scientific name of this species has been changed from *Aster sericeus* to *Symphiotrichum sericeum*. The two names do represent the same plant.

Surveys of Western silvery aster in Canada have found about 6,500 stems. Birds Hill Provincial Park contains Canada's largest populations of Western silvery aster, with about 4,200 stems.

Predation and mining of seed heads by beetles and other insects was found to reduce seed viability in approximately 16 per cent of seed heads collected from Birds Hill and Carlowrie.

The swollen woody rootstock of Western silvery aster is thought to have evolved as an adaptation allowing plants to survive grassland wildfires and drought.



Western silvery aster was listed as Threatened in 1998 by regulation under Manitoba's *Endangered Species Act*. It has also been assigned a status of Threatened by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). A number of American states also list Western silvery aster under their Endangered Species Acts.

Stewardship and recovery

A key component of recovery efforts is the protection of critical habitat. Remnant dry tall grass prairie containing relatively large populations of Western silvery aster are found at Birds Hill Provincial Park. Most other populations, however, lie on private land or on road and railway right-of-ways. Land management techniques promoting the maintenance of native prairie at these sites will help to ensure the survival of Western silvery aster populations.

Monitoring of Manitoba's Western silvery aster populations occurs on a regular basis. A number of new sites have been documented in the last several years.

Get involved in recovery

If you have Western silvery aster on your property, congratulations! Your land management skills have helped maintain an important part of Manitoba's native flora. Please contact Manitoba Conservation at one of the numbers below if you would like more information on what you can do to further enhance your land for this and other native Manitoba plant and animal species.

**Manitoba Conservation
Wildlife and Ecosystem Protection Branch**
Box 24, 200 Saulteaux Crescent
Winnipeg MB R3J 3W3
(204) 945-7775
www.gov.mb.ca/natres/wildlife/index.htm

Manitoba Conservation Regional Offices

Eastern Region
Lac du Bonnet
(204) 345-1427

Interlake Region
Gimli
(204) 642-6077

Red River Region
Winnipeg
(204) 948-3262

Partners in production of this fact sheet:
Manitoba Conservation,
Wildlife and Ecosystem Protection Branch
Environment Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service
Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation

Extirpated Species
Any species once native to Manitoba that has disappeared through all of its Manitoba range. Extirpated species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

Endangered Species
Any native Manitoba species threatened to disappear through all or most of its Manitoba range. Endangered species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

Threatened Species
Any native Manitoba species likely to become endangered or at risk due to low or declining numbers in Manitoba if the factors affecting it don't improve. Threatened species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

Vulnerable Species
Species not regulated under the *Endangered Species Act* but which could eventually be considered Endangered or Threatened if the factors affecting them do not improve.