



Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife
1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581
tel: (508) 389-6360, fax: (508) 389-7891
www.nhesp.org

Commons's Panic-grass

Dichanthelium ovale (Ell.) Gould & Clark
ssp. *pseudopubescens* (Nash) Freckmann and

Lelong

State Status: Special Concern

Federal Status: None

Description: Commons's Panic-grass (*Dichanthelium ovale* ssp. *pseudopubescens*) is a short (15–60 cm; 6–24 in.), hairy perennial in the Grass family (Poaceae). It grows in small clumps and becomes more branched and bushy through the summer. Similar to other panic-grasses, Commons's Panic-grass has an open, branched cluster of small spikelets, and each spikelet contains a single floret (a small individual flower). In Commons's Panic-grass, the inflorescence is 3 to 10 cm tall. The lower stems and leaf sheaths (the lower part of the leaf surrounding the stem) of Commons's Panic-grass are hairy. The upper leaf blades are 2 to 6 mm wide and somewhat hairy on both the upper and lower surfaces.



Commons's Panic-grass growing with other sand plain vegetation on the coast of Massachusetts. Photo by Bruce Sorrie.

Aids to Identification: To positively identify Commons's Panic-grass and other species of *Dichanthelium*, a technical manual must be used. Commons's Panic-grass is distinguished from other members of the genus in part by its distinct ligules of hairs that are 1 to 4 mm long extending from the top of the leaf sheath. Commons's Panic-grass is also characterized by its spikelets, which are 2.1 to 2.6 mm long. Hairs on the vegetative structures of Commons's Panic-grass do not have a small blister (pustule) at the base of each hair.

Similar Species: In Massachusetts, Commons's Panic-grass must be distinguished from *Dichanthelium ovale* ssp. *villosissimum*, which has pustulose-based hairs on the leaf sheaths and larger leaves that are 6 to 10 mm wide. Commons's Panic-grass can be distinguished from other common *Dichanthelium* species by spikelet length. Both Round-fruited Panic-grass (*D. sphaerocarpon*) and Auburn Panic-grass (*D. acuminatum*) have smaller spikelets while Few-flowered Panic-grass (*D. oligoanthes*) has larger spikelets.



Distribution in Massachusetts
1985 - 2012
Based on records in the
Natural Heritage Database

Flowering in Massachusetts

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

Population Status in Massachusetts: Commons's Panic-grass is listed under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act as Special Concern. All listed species are protected from killing, collecting, possessing, or sale, and from activities that would destroy habitat and thus directly or indirectly cause mortality or disrupt critical behaviors. Commons's Panic-grass is currently known from Barnstable and Dukes Counties, and was documented historically from Nantucket County.

Range: Commons's Panic-grass occurs on the coastal plain from Massachusetts to Florida and locally at inland locations from Pennsylvania to Illinois. It also occurs in Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

Habitat: Commons's Panic-grass is typically found in dry, sandy habitat on the coastal plain and in sand barrens. It can also be found in dry pine-oak woods in sites with moderate disturbance. Sandy areas along roadsides and power line cuts may provide ongoing disturbances needed to maintain habitat for Commons's Panic-grass. Plants found in association with Commons's Panic-grass include Auburn Panic-grass, Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), and Pitch Pine (*Pinus rigida*).

Threats and Management Recommendations:

Known habitat locations for Commons's Panic-grass should be protected from dramatic changes in light or moisture conditions. Moderate disturbance may be needed periodically to maintain sandy habitat and to prevent competition and succession. All active management of rare plant populations (including invasive species removal) is subject to review under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act, and should be planned in close consultation with the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program.

References and Additional Information:

Gleason, H. A., and A. Cronquist. 1991. *Manual of Vascular Plants of Northeastern United States and Adjacent Canada*, 2nd edition. The New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, NY.

Haines, A. 2011. *Flora Novae Angliae – a Manual for the Identification of Native and Naturalized Higher Vascular Plants of New England*. New England Wildflower Society, Yale Univ. Press, New Haven, CT.

NatureServe. 2010. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.1. *Sabatia campanulata*. NatureServe, Arlington, VA. <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>.

Updated 2012
Map Updated 2012