

Montana Conservation Assessment for Spalding's Catchfly

Available from the Natural Heritage Program

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Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*) is one of only three Montana plant species listed as "threatened" under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (USFWS 2001). It is restricted to the inland Pacific Northwest, ranging from eastern Washington and northeast Oregon to north-central Idaho, northwest Montana and just into adjacent British Columbia.

While Montana supports just 15% of this species' total range-wide populations, we do host the largest population at The Nature Conservancy's Dancing Prairie Preserve. Estimated at 10,000 plants minimum, this population alone comprises a significant percentage of the total plants known range-wide. Other sizeable populations in Montana occur on the Flathead Indian Reservation and the Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge.

Typical Montana habitat for this plant is rough fescue grasslands on rolling kettle/drumlin topography, swales, minor draws, and north slopes where moisture remains available a little longer into the growing season compared to adjacent drier slopes. These sites often occur near the lower treeline or with scattered ponderosa pine.

A range-wide status assessment of Spalding's catchfly, written in 2004, contained relatively outdated information for Montana. Thanks to survey work in 2004 and 2005 by MTNHP botanist Scott Mincemoyer (funded by the US Fish & Wildlife Service), we now have an up-to-date Montana Conservation Assessment (available at www.mtnhp.org). Scott used predicted habitat modeling to help him locate two new populations, bringing the number of extant occurrences in Montana to eleven. Survey work is challenging because Spalding's catchfly can

stay below ground, especially during dry years, resulting in populations being overlooked or undercounted.

Unfortunately, Montana populations continue to be vulnerable to invasive weeds; habitat loss, and fragmentation, particularly in the Tobacco Plains; and to impacts associated with grazing, fire exclusion, and small, isolated populations. Based on current information, successful conservation will depend on protecting existing populations, improving habitat conditions, rebuilding populations, mitigating impacts of invasive weeds and grazing, and renewed monitoring and survey efforts.

For now, the MTNHP rank for this species remains S1 due to its combined rarity and the level of threats to populations. However, opportunities for beneficial management in Montana should be high since the majority of populations are on lands administered by state or federal agencies, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes or The Nature Conservancy. Contact Scott at 406-444-2817 for more information.