

SFI Biodiversity Species Fact Sheet

Small Whorled Pogonia (*Isotria medeoloides*)

Globally Critically Imperiled/Vulnerable Plant Species; State Rank: S1 (critically imperiled) Global Rank: G2G3 (imperiled, vulnerable)

Identification

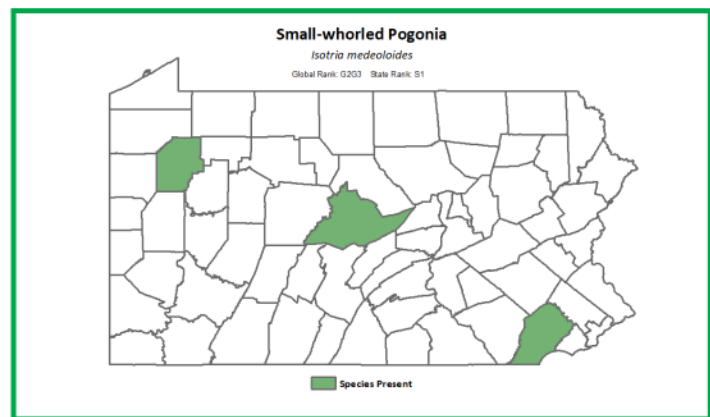
Small whorled pogonia is a wild orchid with one or two greenish-yellow flowers about 1 inch in length with green sepals. Plants blossom from mid-May to mid-June—although may not flower every year. A whorl of 4-6 downwardly pointing leaves sit under the short-stemmed flowers. The more common and similar looking large-whorled pogonia has open steeples with brownish-purple tips; Indian cucumber-root, another look alike, has a two-tiered stem when flowering and 5 to 12 whorled leaves that do not point downward.



Photo Credit: PA Natural Heritage

Biology-Natural History

This Federally endangered plant is one of the rarest orchids in North America. An ~1 inch fruit capsule forms by August; this capsule turns from green to brown as it dries and by fall releases thousands of very small seeds. Most known populations occur in small patches with less than 20 plants, although there are a handful of locations with 50 to 100 plants.



Distribution & Habitat

Small whorled pogonia may be found in mature or second growth hardwood forests about 40 to 75 years old. In Pennsylvania, the plant may favor mixed oak forests on rocky and somewhat acidic soils that occur on dry east or southeast facing hillsides. Small whorled pogonia is associated with Indian cucumber-root, partridge berry, rattle-snake plantain, and witch hazel.

Conservation Concerns

There are only three populations in Pennsylvania, with just a handful of small populations in New Hampshire, Maine, Virginia, and North Carolina. Across the US, most populations occur on private land. The major threats to this plant are collection and habitat loss through development.

Management Practices

Protecting existing populations, surveying for new populations, monitoring, and working with private landowners are key to maintaining and enhancing this rare orchid. If anyone observes this species, they should not collect specimens or harvest parts of the plant, instead, call the jurisdictional agency, DCNR Bureau of Forestry at 717-787-3444.