

***Astragalus australis* (L.) Lam. var. *cottonii* (M.E.**

Jones) S.L. Welsh

synonym: *Astragalus cottonii* M.E. Jones, *Astragalus australis* (L.) Lam. var. *olympicus* Isely

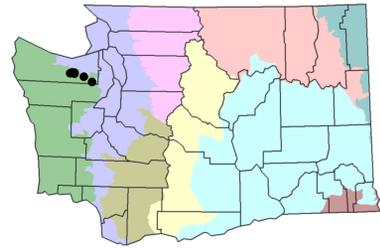
Cotton's milk-vetch

Fabaceae - pea family

status: State Threatened, Federal Species of Concern,

BLM sensitive, USFS sensitive

rank: G5T2 / S2



General Description: Perennial, from a well-branched crown and deep taproot, covered with grayish hairs. Stems thick, 1-2.5 dm long, internodes short. Leaves 2-4 (6) cm long, pinnate. Leaflets 11-17, linear-elliptic to oblong-obovate, 8-16 mm long. Stipules ovate to oblong-lanceolate, 3-6 mm long, only the lowest sometimes fused.

Floral Characteristics: Flowers 7-20 per raceme, 7-10 mm long on stalks 0.5-2 mm long, creamy white with a purplish tinge on the keel, banner erect. Calyx tube hairy, about 2/3 the length of the corolla, teeth from 1/2 to nearly as long as the tube.

Fruits: Stalked pods, the body strongly inflated, hairless, oblong-ellipsoid, 2.5 cm x 5-10 mm, reddish amber at maturity, slightly compressed, not grooved. Identifiable June to September.

Identification Tips: Most easily identified with mature fruits. *Astragalus microcystis* is also known from the Olympic Mts. of WA, but it does not have the characteristic large, swollen, reddish pods of *A. australis* var. *cottonii*.

Range: The entire range of this taxon is a portion of the northeast Olympic Mts., in an area about 6 x 12 km (10 x 20 mi.).

Habitat/Ecology: High-elevation alpine zone on unstable talus or scree slopes, and ridges with a mostly southerly or westerly aspect; confined to gravelly to sandy soils rich in limestone. Associated vegetation is usually sparse, but may include juniper (*Juniperus communis*), white sagebrush (*Artemisia ludoviciana*), onion (*Allium* spp.), spreading phlox (*Phlox diffusa*), locoweed (*Oxytropis borealis*), Davidson's penstemon (*Penstemon davidsonii*), and littleleaf pussy-toes (*Antennaria microphylla*). Elevations: 1460-1830 m (4800-6000 ft). On steep slopes this species is probably subjected to sliding and downhill creep. There is probably considerable frost heaving of soils, which may keep other species from establishing, thereby reducing competition.

Comments: Threats include disturbance from introduced mountain goats and hikers.

References: Buckingham et al. 1995; Franklin & Dyrness 1973; Isely 1998; Kaye 1989.

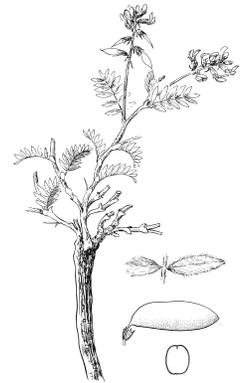


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