

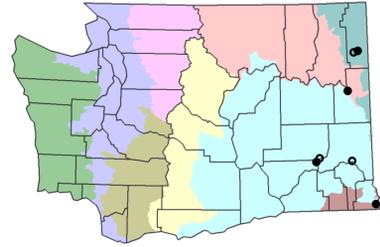
Spartina pectinata Link

prairie cordgrass

Poaceae - grass family

status: State Sensitive, BLM sensitive, USFS sensitive

rank: G5 / S2



General Description: Rhizomatous perennial (5) 8-20 (30) dm tall; rhizomes long, scaly, purplish brown or light brown (drying white), (2) 3-8 mm thick. Leaf blades 20-96 cm x 5-15 mm, flat when fresh, becoming rolled inward when dry, the margins strongly roughened. Ligules a fringe of fine straight hairs 1-3 mm long.

Floral Characteristics: Panicles 10-50 cm long; spikes numerous, appressed, (4) 5-9 (15) cm long. Spikelets densely crowded, 40-80 per spike, 1-flowered, strongly compressed. Lower glume 5-10 mm, from 3/4 as long to equaling the lemma, with comblike stiff hairs on the keel, narrowed to a short awn; upper glume 10-25 mm (including awn), exceeding the lemma, strongly spiny-toothed on its keel, awn 3-8 mm. Lemmas with stiff hairs on the keel; tips awnless, usually rounded. Flowers June to July.

Fruits: Rarely produced.

Identification Tips: In WA, *S. gracilis* occurs close to the range of *S. pectinata*. *S. gracilis* can be distinguished by its narrower leaves (2.5-8 mm broad), shorter stature (3-10 dm tall), whitish rhizomes, and awnless or short-awned smaller upper glume (7-10 mm long); it typically occurs in saline habitats. *S. pectinata* occurs along rivers.

Range: Alberta to Newfoundland, and throughout most of the U.S., south to OR, UT, NM, TX, LA, and GA.

Habitat/Ecology: Known from wet swales, meadows, edges of marshes and ponds; WA populations are generally along river banks. Somewhat tolerant of alkaline conditions. Associates include willow (*Salix exigua*), common reed (*Phragmites australis*), spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*), sedges (*Carex* spp.) and reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*). Reproduction is almost entirely vegetative; vigorous rhizomes allow *S. pectinata* to form pure stands. It occurs in noticeably different climates, in a wide range of wetland and riparian types, and in a wide range of soil types.

Comments: WA has few locations that are small in area and in numbers of plants. *S. pectinata* is also rare in several states, Alberta, and Newfoundland. Threats include hydrologic disturbance and invasion of nonnative plants.

References: Cronquist et al. 1972-94, vol. 6; Flora of North America 1993+, vol. 25; Godfrey & Wooten 1979.



Illustration by Jeanne R. Janish,
©1969 University of Washington
Press



photo by Florence Caplow



photo by Florence Caplow