

SPALDING'S CATCHFLY

Silene spaldingii S. Watson

Plant Symbol = SISP2

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Idaho Plant Materials Program



Figure 1. Spalding's catchfly. Photo by C. Menke.

Alternate Names

Spalding's campion, Spalding's silene

Status

Spalding's catchfly was listed as threatened by the US Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service in 2001. It is listed in Idaho as threatened (State of Idaho, 2009) and endangered in Oregon (Oregon Department of Agriculture, 2009). In Washington state it is considered threatened with a status of S2 (Washington State, 2010), and in Montana it has a rank of S1 (Montana Natural Heritage Program, 2010). Natureserve ranks it G2, Globally imperiled, with a US national status of N2, and Canada national status N1 (Natureserve, 2010). It is listed as endangered in Canada (Government of Canada, 2010).

Description

General: Carnation or pink family (Caryophyllaceae). Spalding's catchfly is a long-lived perennial forb that emerges in spring from a woody root crown and dies back to below ground level each fall. Plants range from 8 to 30

inches tall with generally one to few yellow-green stems per plant. Each stem bears four to seven (up to 12) pairs of 2- 3 inch long, lance-shaped leaves (Hitchcock et al., 1964). It has swollen nodes where the leaves attach to the stem. The plant is covered in dense sticky hairs that frequently trap dust and insects, hence the common name catchfly. Flowers have a tubular calyx approximately 0.6 inches long; the pale white petals extend slightly beyond the sepals. Flowers bloom from mid-July through August and sometimes into September. It may remain dormant for 3- 6 consecutive years without emerging. The plant has a very large taproot (3 ft or longer).

Distribution:

Spalding's catchfly is native to portions of Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia, Canada. It occupies five physiographic regions: the Palouse Grasslands in west-central Idaho and southeastern Washington; the Channeled Scablands in eastern Washington; the Blue Mountain Basins in northeastern Oregon; the Canyon Grasslands of the Snake River and its tributaries in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington; and the intermountain valleys of northwestern Montana. There are currently 99 known populations of Spalding's catchfly, 66 populations are composed of fewer than 100 individuals each. Twenty-three populations contain 100 or more individuals apiece, and the 10 largest populations are each made up of more than 500 plants (USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, 2007). For current distribution, consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Habitat:

The species occurs in dry to moist grasslands in bunchgrass and sagebrush-steppe habitats with Idaho fescue and bluebunch wheatgrass being the dominant components. Occasionally plants can be found in open pine habitats. (USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, 2007).

Adaptation

Plants can be found from 1900 to 3600 ft in elevation. Spalding's catchfly grows on all aspects but is most often encountered on north facing slopes.

The plants prefer sites with deep silt-loam soils (Natureserve, 2010).

Establishment

Spalding's catchfly reproduces solely by seed. It does not spread by rhizomes or other asexual means. It is partially self-compatible (Lesica & Heidel 1996), but its offspring are more fit if cross-pollinated (Lesica 1993). Bumblebees appear to be the primary pollinator (Lesica and Heidel, 1996).

Seedlings germinate in the spring, form rosettes the first year, and occasionally flower the second year. Generally flowering does not occur until the third or subsequent growing seasons. Adult plants emerge from the caudex in spring as either a stemmed plant, a rosette, or occasionally as a plant with both rosette(s) and stem(s). Stemmed plants may remain vegetative or may become reproductive in July or August. Plants senesce or wither in fall (September or October), reappearing the next spring (USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, 2007).

Laboratory studies have shown that seed germination increases following a four to eight week cold stratification period (Lesica, 1993).

Spalding's catchfly arises from a very large tap root which may be up to 3 feet deep. This greatly reduces the potential for transplanting.

Pests and Potential Problems

Threats to Spalding's catchfly primarily involve loss of habitat. This includes habitat loss due to human development, habitat degradation associated with domestic livestock and wildlife grazing, changes in fire frequency and seasonality, and invasions of aggressive non-native plants. Plants are also susceptible to herbicide spray drift and off-road vehicle use. The species may also suffer loss of genetic fitness from population fragmentation (USDA Forest Service, 2009).

Management

Recovery strategies for Spalding's catchfly involve reducing identified threats to catchfly habitat. Measures include limiting adverse grazing and off-road vehicle use, protecting pollinators, incorporating integrated pest management strategies, and appropriate fire management (USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, 2010).

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