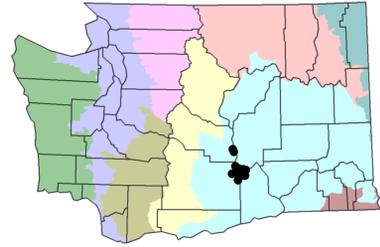


Astragalus columbianus Barneby

Columbia milk-vetch

Fabaceae - pea family

status: State Sensitive, Federal Species of Concern, BLM
sensitive
rank: G3 / S3



General Description: Taprooted, low, sprawling perennial with reddish stems. Leaves pinnately compound with 5-13 leaflets.

Floral Characteristics: Flowers 2-10 per raceme, 18-19 mm long, brilliant white, becoming creamy or yellowish with age. Banner greater than 16 mm. Banner and wing petals much longer than keel. Calyx 11-12 mm with short black hairs, teeth about 1/2 the length of the tube. Flowers mid-March to early May.

Fruits: Sessile pods shiny green or red where exposed to direct sun, succulent when young, 2.5-4 cm long, curved 1/4-1/2 turn. Dry fruits black, obcompressed except for the laterally flattened, long beak. Fruits split open through beak while still attached to the plant. Fruits develop mid- to late-April and mature through mid-June.

Identification Tips: Most easily identified with mature fruits. To determine if the stipules are fused, look at the very lowest stipule on the stem. *Astragalus speirocarpus* occurs in similar habitats but flowers later (beginning mid-April), has flowers that are often smaller (12-20 mm), with purple-tipped keels, calyx teeth scarcely 1/4 as long as the tube, and fruits that are strongly coiled into a ring. *A. columbianus* has fruits that are merely curved and calyces with teeth 1/2 as long as the tube.

Range: Restricted to an area approximately 40 x 8 km (25 x 5 mi.) along the Columbia River.

Habitat/Ecology: Shrub steppe habitats from 130 to 700 m (420-2320 ft), on sandy or gravelly loams, silts, rocky silt loams, and lithosols. Associated species include big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), stiff sagebrush (*Artemisia rigida*), bluebunch wheatgrass (*Pseudoroegneria spicata*), and milk-vetch (*Astragalus carcinus*, *A. purshii*, *A. speirocarpus*, *A. succumbens*). *A. columbianus* increases following low-intensity fires and may colonize dirt roads. However, populations in disturbed or burned areas generally do not persist.

Comments: Habitats and portions of populations have been lost through orchard development. Due to the ephemeral nature of some populations, suitable habitats within its range should be inventoried periodically, even if past inventories produced negative results.

References: Mastrogiuseppe & Gill 1983; Sauer et al. 1979.



photo by Joe Arnett



photo by John Gamon