

## ***Astragalus cusickii* A. Gray var. *cusickii***

Cusick's milk-vetch

Fabaceae - pea family

status: State Sensitive, BLM sensitive, USFS sensitive

rank: G5T4 / S1?



**General Description:** Perennial from a woody taproot with numerous stems that are leafless at the base, 30-60 cm tall. Leaves greenish, pinnate, (5) 6-10 cm long, with 7-11 (13) linear leaflets, each 5-20 mm long, with straight appressed hairs on the upper surface. Stipules lanceolate, 2-5 mm long, the lowermost sometimes fused together.

**Floral Characteristics:** Flowers white, 10-30 in loose racemes. Calyx tube 5-6.5 mm long, with blackish appressed hairs; teeth triangular, not quite 1 mm long. Flowers May to June.

**Fruits:** Pods thin, appearing translucent, hairless, nearly round in cross section, obovoid, 2.5-4.5 cm long, 12-22 mm broad when pressed, borne on slender stalk. Fruits June to July.

**Identification Tips:** Most easily identified with mature fruits. *A. cusickii* var. *flexipes* is similar but is taller and more slender, with leaflets generally hairless on the upper surface, flowers usually with a purple-tipped keel, calyx 4-5 mm long, and pods that are half-obovoid or half-ellipsoid, only 6-12 mm broad when pressed. It may be difficult or impossible to distinguish the 2 forms where their distribution overlaps along the Snake River Canyon, from the mouth of the Salmon River to the mouth of the Grand Ronde River.

**Range:** Regional endemic of ID, OR, and WA; Snake River Canyon and its tributaries to the mouth of the Grand Ronde River in eastern OR.

**Habitat/Ecology:** Dry grassy or rocky slopes in loose, finely textured soils derived from basalt, including ledges or crevices of basalt cliffs, bare soil on road cuts, talus, and sagebrush plains; usually in areas where vegetative cover is less than 50%. Associated species include bluebunch wheatgrass (*Pseudoroegneria spicata*), Idaho fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*), Sandberg's bluegrass (*Poa secunda*), arrowleaf balsamroot (*Balsamorhiza sagittata*), biscuitroot (*Lomatium spp.*), and yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*). Elevations in WA: 300-1160 m (1000-3800 ft). This taxon inhabits very rugged, physically isolated, and drought-prone areas with extremely high and low seasonal temperatures.

**Comments:** Locally abundant within a small range and restricted habitat. Potentially threatened by overgrazing by cattle or elk.

**References:** Barneby 1964.

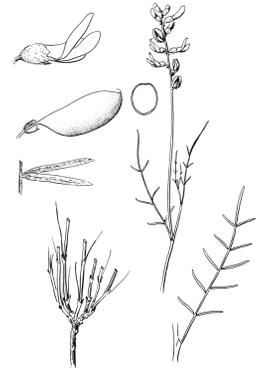


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