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.


Adapted from Field Guide to the Rare Plants of Washington
http://www.washington.edu/uwpress/search/books/CAMFIE.html