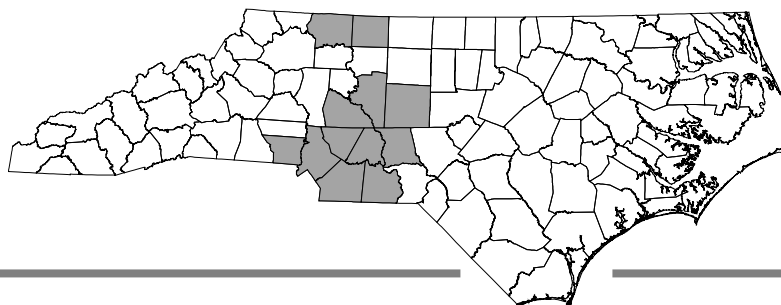


Schweinitz's sunflower

Helianthus schweinitzii

Endangered (June 7, 1991)



Description: Schweinitz's sunflower is a perennial rhizomatous herb with one to several hairy purple stems growing from a cluster of carrot-like tuberous roots. It is usually 3.2-6.5 feet (1-2 m) tall, but may grow up to 10 ft (3 m) high. Leaves are 2-7 inches (6-18 cm) long, 0.4-0.8 inch (1-2 cm) wide, lance-shaped, and usually opposite, with upper leaves alternate. Leaves feel like felt on the underside and rough like sandpaper on the upper surface. Leaf edges tend to curl under. Flowers are yellow composites which are relatively smaller than those of other sunflowers in North America. Nutlets are dark brown 0.13-0.14 inch (3.3-3.5 mm) long with a blunt tip.

Life History: Plants sprout from tubers in March and April; seeds germinate at the same time. Vegetative growth continues through the summer. Flowering and fruiting occur mid-September to frost. This is a long-lived perennial with individuals probably living for decades. Typically grows in full sunlight or partial shade but is intolerant of full shade.

Habitat: Clearings and edges of upland woods, thickets, and pastures. Found along roadsides, powerline clearings, old pastures, and woodland openings. Requires disturbance (blowdowns, storm, or fire) to create open areas for full sunlight, but may also grow in open stands of trees with minimal shade. Soils may be either shallow, sandy with high gravel content, or a clayey hardpan. The sunflower may prefer soils derived from basic material.

Distribution: Endemic to the southern piedmont of the Carolinas. Currently, 67 populations exist in North Carolina. These populations survive along roadsides or within utility line rights-of-way in Anson, Cabarrus, Davidson, Gaston, Mecklenburg, Montgomery, Randolph, Rowan,

Stanly, Stokes*, Surry, and Union counties.

Threats: Loss of habitat due to suppression of periodic fire regime and discontinued grazing by native herbivores, residential and industrial development, mining, encroachment by invasive exotic species such as privet, highway construction and improvement, and roadside and utility right-of-way maintenance during the growing season or with herbicide.

Management Recommendations: Protection and maintenance of habitat is most important to prevent loss of this species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and N.C. Natural Heritage Program continue to work with the North Carolina and South Carolina Departments of Transportation to protect roadside populations. The Nature Conservancy has initiated a prescribed burning program to maintain populations on their land.

* No record has been reported in this county in the past 20 years.

Sources: Hardin 1977; Radford et al. 1964; USFWS 1992d, 1994d.

