



SPECIAL FEATURES IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

GLOBALLY RARE AND MAY-BE-AT-RISK VASCULAR PLANTS



Photo credit: J. Overholt

VASCULAR PLANTS

What are globally rare and may-be-at-risk vascular plants?

The term “rare” refers to species that exist in low numbers, have a restricted range or are of conservation concern due to population trends or threats. Globally rare plants are ranked by **NatureServe**. Vascular plant species are likely to be globally rare or may-be-at-risk if they require very specific habitat types. For example, some plants have adapted to the high levels of mineral salts found in the water and soils of hot or cold springs, and therefore would normally only occur in those specific circumstances.

Globally rare and may-be-at-risk vascular plants in the NWT

In 1999, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT), in collaboration with the Working Group on General Status of NWT Species, began the **NWT General Status Ranking Program**. The program compiles information on NWT species and catalogues them in a central database. A ranking methodology is applied to each species in the catalogue, prioritizing species by their biological status and the need for more detailed assessments. This database is updated as new information becomes available and helps to identify conservation priorities for species.

There are at least 1,183 known species of vascular plants in the NWT. Of these, nine are of global conservation concern.

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Of the globally rare species, two are endemic to the NWT, meaning the NWT is the only place in the world where they occur. These are the hairy rockcress (*Braya pilosa*) and the Nahanni aster (*Symphyotrichum nahanniense*). Three other species are found in very restricted distributions in the NWT and neighbouring areas. These are the Drummond bluebell (*Mertensia drummondii*), the Raup's willow (*Salix raupii*) and the Banks Island alkali grass (*Puccinellia banksiensis*).

These five globally rare plant species in the NWT are from areas that remained glacier free during the last Ice Age. These ice-free areas acted as glacial refugia allowing these plant species to survive the last Ice Age.

There has generally been a low sampling effort throughout the NWT for vascular plants, which could lead to some plant species being misclassified as rare.

How can we protect globally rare and may-be-at-risk vascular plants?

Practice “**Leave No Trace**” principles in the backcountry.

If you think you see a rare or at-risk plant, take a picture of it and send it to Environment and Natural Resources at nwtsoer@gov.nt.ca to help us develop and maintain a comprehensive database on globally rare and may-be-at-risk vascular plants in the NWT.

To minimize the impacts on globally rare and may-be-at-risk vascular plants and associated conservation features, developers are asked to observe the following best practices:

- If you are conducting land use activities, make sure you obtain current information and surveys for globally rare and may-be-at-risk vascular plants in your area of interest. As well, identify any impacts of your proposed activities, and determine appropriate mitigation measures to minimize impacts on globally rare and may-be-at-risk vascular plants.
- Monitor and adapt your land use activities and mitigation efforts to make sure there are minimal impacts on globally rare and may-be-at-risk vascular plants.

Where Can I Get More Information?

Visit the Conservation Network Planning **webpage** for other information sheets, reports and most recent maps.

Email Conservation Network Planning at conservationplanning@gov.nt.ca



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