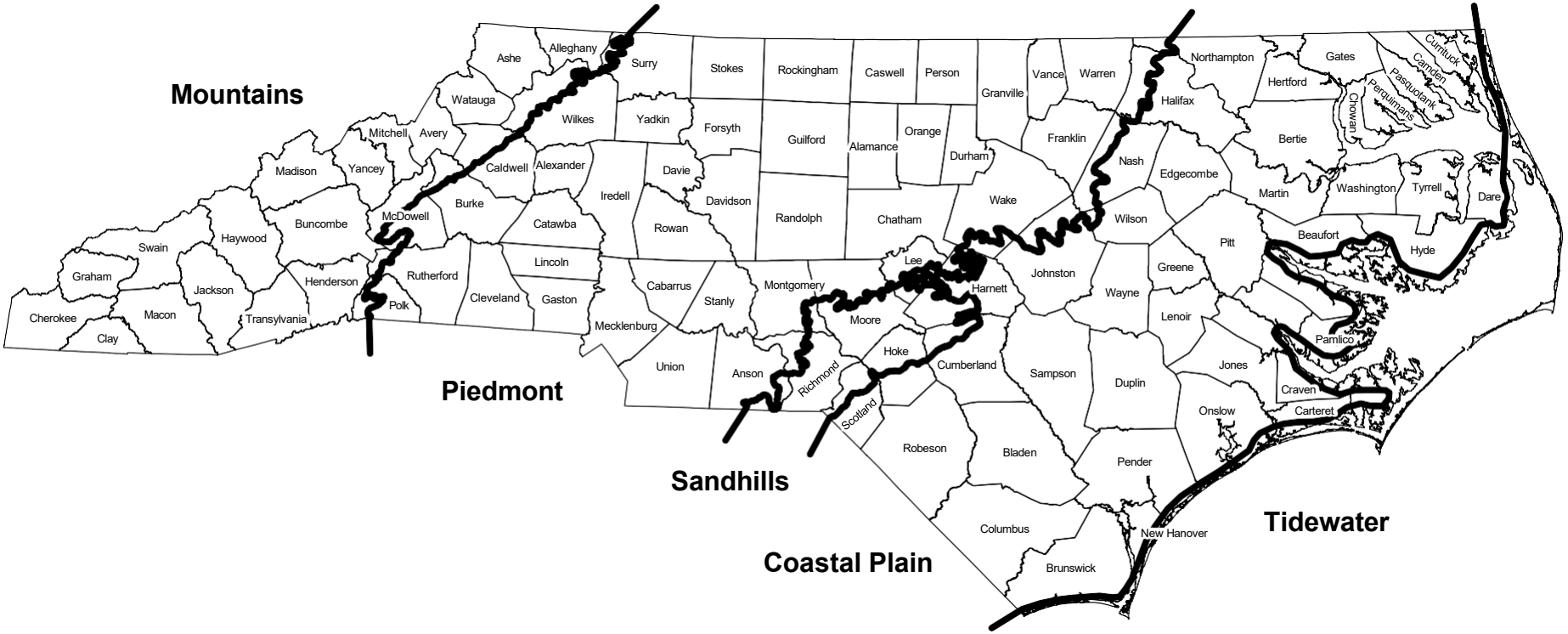


THE COUNTIES AND PHYSIOGRAPHIC PROVINCES OF NORTH CAROLINA

Natural Heritage Program List of Rare Plant Species of North Carolina

2026

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Cover: Flaxleaf Seedbox (*Ludwigia linifolia*), photo by Katherine Culatta

This list is dynamic and is revised as new data become available. New species are added to the list, and others are dropped from the list as appropriate. The list is generally published every two years. Further information may be obtained by contacting the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program, Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, 1651 MSC, Raleigh, NC 27699-1651. Additional information on rare species, as well as a digital version of this list, can be obtained from the Natural Heritage Program's website at www.ncnhp.org.

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INTRODUCTION

The North Carolina Natural Heritage Program (NCNHP) conducts and maintains an inventory of known locations of rare animals and plants in the state as part of its mission to support conservation of natural areas. The primary functions of this inventory list are its use 1) in determining priorities for protection of the state's most important natural areas and the animals and plants contained therein, 2) in determining priorities for inventory, and 3) by public agencies, conservation organizations, and private persons for environmental assessment and land management planning.

The North Carolina Natural Heritage Program is charged under the Nature Preserves Act (G.S. 143B-135.250 - 143B-135.272) to compile and maintain data and information relevant to the protection of North Carolina's most important natural areas. The Program takes the lead role in the inventory and assessment of the state's natural diversity and the identification of important natural areas and rare species habitats. The list incorporates the most recent federal status designations determined by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for plant taxa native to North Carolina. This list also includes North Carolina legal status information from the N.C. Plant Conservation Program (NCPCP). NCPCP is responsible for the listing and protection of the state's plants, under NC General Statutes Chapter 106 Article 19B 106-202.12. The NCNHP, NCPCP, and USFWS work cooperatively to ensure the continued survival of all of North Carolina's rich flora.

The rare plants in North Carolina are monitored (or tracked) in the Natural Heritage database. The Program tracks approximately 950 plants including vascular plants, bryophytes (mosses, liverworts, hornworts), and lichenized fungi. For all tracked species, we conduct conservation status assessments following NatureServe methodology, and map standardized occurrences in the NatureServe Biotics data management system, which includes maps and tabular data.

Status and Rank

The North Carolina Natural Heritage Program (NCNHP) maintains information on the legal status (federal and/or state) for all rare plants in North Carolina. A state rank is also determined and maintained for all plants known to occur in the state.
Many species that lack formal federal or state legal protection are nonetheless rare or uncommon in North Carolina. To convey information about the rarity of these plants within the state, NCNHP provides status designations that fall into two categories: Significantly Rare (SR) or Watch List (W). The North Carolina Status codes and definitions are provided in the Explanation of Status and Rank Codes document.

List Format

The Natural Heritage Program List of Rare Plant Species of North Carolina is available in both document and spreadsheet formats. The document lists species organized by five major taxonomic groups: Vascular Plant, Moss, Liverwort, Hornwort, and Lichen. Within a given group, species are listed alphabetically by scientific name. A common name is provided as well as the status and rank for each taxon. The supplementary spreadsheet allows for sorting and filtering and provides additional information on the geographical distribution and habitat for each taxon. To learn more about the information provided in the list please review the Explanation of Status and Rank Codes document.

Taxonomy

Taxonomic Group: Each taxon is categorized into one of five major groups: Vascular Plant, Moss, Liverwort, Hornwort, and Lichen.

Scientific Name: The binomial or trinomial taxon name is provided. Scientific authorities for names have been omitted to save space. Scientific names are standardized to follow the taxon concepts and nomenclature used by the following standard references:

- Vascular Plants (dicots, monocots, gymnosperms, ferns, and fern allies): Weakley, A.S., and Southeastern Flora Team. 2026. Flora of the southeastern United States Web App. University of North Carolina Herbarium, North Carolina Botanical Garden, Chapel Hill, U.S.A. fsus.ncbg.unc.edu.

- Lichens: Perlmutter, G. and T. Howard. 2026. Lichens of North Carolina [Internet]. Raleigh (NC): North Carolina Biodiversity Project and North Carolina State Parks. Available from https://auth1.dpr.ncparks.gov/lichen/index.php.

- Bryophytes (mosses, liverworts, hornworts): Amoroso, J.L., B. Aguero, D. DuMond, and T. Howard. 2026. The Bryophytes of North Carolina [Internet]. Raleigh (NC): North Carolina Biodiversity Project and North Carolina State Parks. Available from https://auth1.dpr.ncparks.gov/bryophytes/index.php.

Common Name: Common names are not standardized and do not follow a particular concept or flora.

NC Natural Heritage Inventory

The Program maintains and continues to build the Natural Heritage inventory for the state of North Carolina. This inventory is the single most comprehensive compilation of records documenting the location and ecological status of rare plant species in the state. Staff ecologists, botanists, and zoologists, and cooperating agencies conduct the ongoing research and field surveys to generate information for the inventory. Data and information are also supplied by an extensive network of botanical professionals and volunteer citizen scientists. We derive records from historical reports, herbarium specimens, agency records, iNaturalist, in addition to precise reports and maps of field observations.

Contribute Data

NCNHP requests locality and population information for the species listed in the Natural Heritage Program List of Rare Plant Species of North Carolina as well as those species designated as Watch List. If you would like to provide observations, data and information please complete a NCNHP Plant Survey Form at https://www.ncnhp.org/share-data. You may also contribute data via iNaturalist. Please visit the Rare Vascular Plants of North Carolina Project on iNaturalist and read the journal posts to learn more about how to join the project.