

Astragalus multiflorus (Pursh) A. Gray

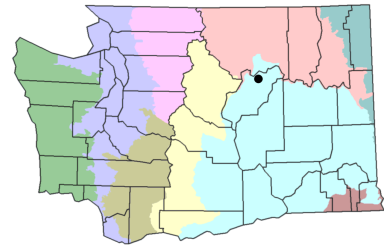
synonym: *Astragalus tenellus* Pursh

loose-flower milk-vetch

Fabaceae - pea family

status: State Threatened, BLM strategic

rank: G5 / S1



General Description: Freely branching greenish perennial; herbage sparsely covered with small, straight, appressed hairs. Stems slender, numerous, nearly erect, 20-60 cm tall. Leaves pinnate, (3) 5-8 (10) cm long. Leaflets usually 11-25 (up to 31), linear-lanceolate to linear-oblongate, (5) 10-20 mm x 1.5-5 mm broad. Stipules fused opposite the petioles, 3-6 mm long.

Floral Characteristics: Peduncles mostly shorter than the leaves, usually much shorter than the racemes. Racemes with 7-20 flowers. Pedicels 1-3 mm long. Flowers 6-9 mm long, mostly yellowish white, sometimes pinkish-tinged; keel usually purplish-tipped. Banner erect, wings 1-2 mm longer than the keel. Calyx 2.5-4 mm long, teeth linear-lanceolate, about 2/3 as long as the tube. Flowers June to July.

Fruits: Pendulous, with stalks up to twice as long as the calyx, pods hairless (in the Pacific Northwest), often finely mottled, membranous, linear-elliptic, 7-15 x 3-5 mm, strongly compressed, 1-celled.

Identification Tips: Most easily identified with mature fruits. To determine if the stipules are fused, look at the very lowest stipule on the stem; stipules in this species are often darker than the stem. *A. filipes* is distinguished by its longer pods (15-35 mm) on long and slender stalks (10-15 mm long), and longer flowers (9-13 mm). *A. microcystis*, also a rare species, has pods which are sessile, inflated, and obovoid to nearly spherical.

Range: Great Plains, north to the Yukon, west to the Rocky Mts. and the eastern Great Basin. Disjunct on the Thompson Plateau, B.C., and the Columbia Plateau, WA.

Habitat/Ecology: Alkaline clay and calcareous soils in grasslands, preferring bare, fast-eroding outcrops and slopes. Elevation of WA site: 600 m (1950 ft). Associated species include big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), prickly phlox (*Linanthus pungens*), fescue (*Festuca spp.*), Sandberg's bluegrass (*Poa secunda*), and basalt milk-vetch (*Astragalus filipes*).

Comments: There is only 1 known extant occurrence in WA. Immediate threats include livestock grazing and competition from nonnative species. The easily erodible substrate increases the vulnerability of the population. This species is also rare in the Yukon Territory, and possibly extirpated from Quebec and MN.

References: Barneby 1964; Reveal et al. 2004.

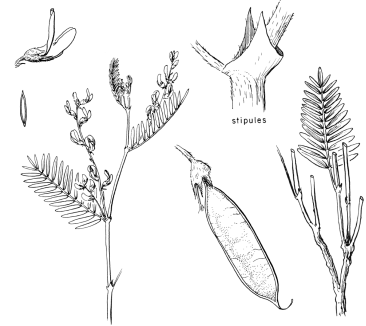


Illustration by Jeanne R. Janish,
©1961 University of Washington
Press



© James Reveal