

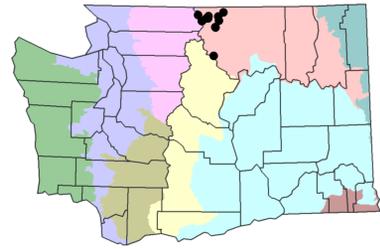
***Polemonium viscosum* Nutt.**

skunk polemonium

Polemoniaceae - phlox family

status: State Sensitive, BLM sensitive, USFS sensitive

rank: G5 / S1S2



General Description: Low perennial from a stout taproot and branched caudex, up to 2 (4) dm in height, densely glandular or hairy-glandular, with a strong skunky odor. Leaves pinnately compound, mostly basal, up to 1.5 (2) dm long, including the short petiole. Leaflets numerous, crowded, opposite, with usually 2-5 lobes cleft almost to the base, thus appearing whorled. The individual lobes are rounded, 1.5-6 mm x 1-3 mm.

Floral Characteristics: Inflorescence dense, headlike, usually elongating a little in fruit. Calyx tubular, glandular, 7-12 mm long when flowering; lobes 5, narrow, pointed, and shorter than the tube. Corolla blue, funnel or tubular-funnel shaped, often conspicuously longer than wide, (13) 17-25 (30) mm long, with 5 lobes that are shorter than the tube. Flowers July to August.

Fruits: Capsules.

Identification Tips: *Polemonium elegans* is also strongly scented and has a corolla longer than wide. However, *P. elegans* is a much shorter plant (up to 15 cm tall) with a smaller corolla (12-15 mm long) and entire leaflets that do not appear whorled.

Range: Coast ranges of southern B.C. to southwest Alberta, south to AZ and NM; absent from CA.

Habitat/Ecology: At high altitudes, commonly above timberline, in open rocky places, talus slopes, rock outcrops, glacial cirques, and alpine fellfields. Elevations in WA: 1900-2500 m (6350-8200 ft). Associated species include whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*), alpine fescue (*Festuca brachyphylla*), Trelease's draba (*Draba paysonii* var. *treleasei*), Davidson's penstemon (*Penstemon davidsonii*), pygmyflower (*Androsace septentrionalis*), snow cinquefoil (*Potentilla nivea*), spike trisetum (*Trisetum spicatum*), eightpetal mountain-avens (*Dryas octopetala*), alpine yellow fleabane (*Erigeron aureus*), twinflower sandwort (*Minuartia obtusiloba*), and dunhead sedge (*Carex phaeocephala*). Plants within a population have either a sweet or skunky flower odor; pollinating bees are attracted to the sweet-scented flowers, while flies are attracted to the skunky flowers. Fecundity is affected by ants, which damage the sweet-smelling flowers by chewing through reproductive organs to consume nectar.

Comments: This species is also rare in B.C., Alberta, and AZ.

References: Galen 1983; Galen & Kavan 1983.

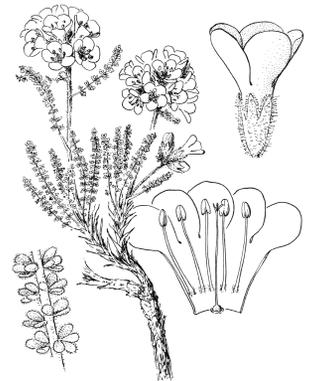


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