

***Schizachyrium scoparium* (Michx.) Nash var. *scoparium***

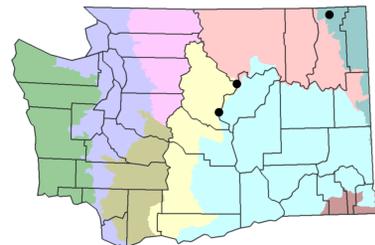
synonym: *Andropogon scoparius* Michx.

little bluestem

Poaceae - grass family

status: State Threatened, BLM sensitive

rank: G5T5 / S1S2



**General Description:** Tufted perennial grass, sometimes producing short rhizomes; stems erect, grooved above the nodes, usually 8-10 dm tall. Leaf sheaths usually hairless and strongly keeled (sometimes rounded). Ligules 0.5-2 mm long, margins jagged or finely fringed with hairs. Blades flat, 1.5-9 mm broad, usually hairless.

**Floral Characteristics:** Panicle branches each ending in a purplish arching raceme 3-5 cm long; main stem densely hairy. Each node has 2 spikelets, one sessile and one stalked. The stalked spikelet is usually sterile (sometimes male), 1-6 mm long, lemma usually absent; stalks stiff, the bases 0.2-0.5 mm wide, gradually widening to 0.3-1 mm above. Sessile spikelet 6-11 mm long, 2-flowered, the upper flower fertile, the lower empty. Upper lemmas cleft to half their length; awns 2.5-17 mm long. Glumes nearly equal, the lower glume hairless. Identifiable July to September.



Illustration by Jeanne R. Janish,  
©1969 University of Washington  
Press

**Identification Tips:** This is the only species of *Schizachyrium* in the Pacific Northwest. It blooms late compared to most perennial grasses and is distinguished vegetatively by its strongly reddish cast.

**Range:** Southern Canada and most of the U.S., except OR and NV.

**Habitat/Ecology:** Open places, in a variety of soils. Little bluestem is a major component of midwestern prairie grasslands. In WA it grows in sand, silt, cobble and gravel, above and below the high water line of the Columbia River; often in high-quality riparian plant communities dominated by native bunchgrasses. Elevations in WA: 185-400 m (610-1320 ft). Associated species include ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), Rocky Mountain juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*), serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*), Fendler threeawn (*Aristida purpurea* var. *longiseta*), western wheatgrass (*Pascopyrum smithii*), bluegrass (*Poa* spp.), white sagebrush (*Artemisia ludoviciana*), needle-and-thread (*Hesperostipa comata*), false goldenaster (*Heterotheca villosa*), Gray's biscuitroot (*Lomatium grayi*), and sweetclover (*Melilotus officinalis*).



photo by Rex Crawford

**Comments:** Threats include conversion of habitat to orchards, weed invasion, and hydrologic changes from hydroelectric dam management. This taxon is also rare in Alberta and New Brunswick.

**References:** Cronquist et al. 1972-94, vol. 6; Flora of North America 1993+, vol. 25.



photo by Rex Crawford