

Ovate Spikerush

Eleocharis ovata

Cyperaceae (Sedge Family)

- Status: Red / Not Assessed
- Best Survey Time: July to September
- General Habitat: Wetland

RANGE

- Found in along the west coast of North America from British Columbia south to Arizona; also in eastern North America in Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes south to West Virginia
- In B.C., known from three locations in the Okanagan Valley and two sites in the Lower Mainland

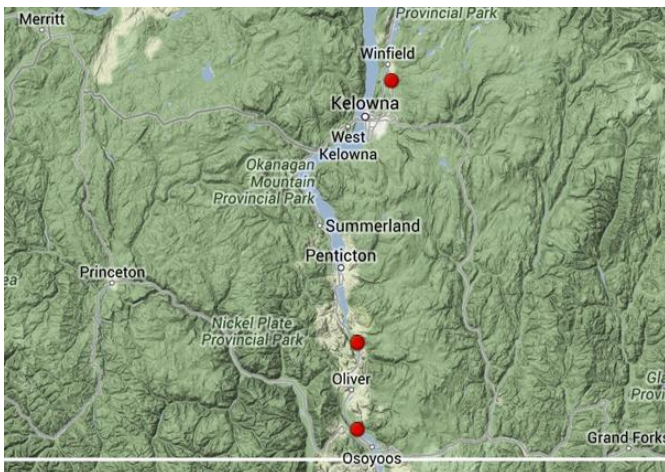


Figure 1 Thompson Okanagan distribution of *E. ovata* (BC CDC 2014)

HABITAT

- In B.C., found along exposed mudflats of receded lakeshores, wet meadows and river margins in the Ponderosa Pine Biogeoclimatic Zone
- Associates include lowland cudweed (*Gnaphalium palustre*), blunt-leaved yellow cress (*Rorippa curvipes*), nodding beggarticks (*Bidens cernua*), other species of spike-rushes (*Eleocharis* spp.), nut-sedges (*Cyperus* spp.) and sedges (*Carex* spp.)



Figure 2 Mudflat with common associates at Ellison Lake, B.C.



Figure 3 Close up of flowering spikelets

LIFE HISTORY

- Annual, wind-pollinated species that grows each year from seed, flowering in the summer
- Germination and development seem to depend on the recession of spring high water levels, exposing the mudflats on which the species depends
- Mature achenes are produced in the late summer and fall, then float to new sites during the winter inundation period or are distributed by waterfowl
- May not appear in some years due to persistent high water levels

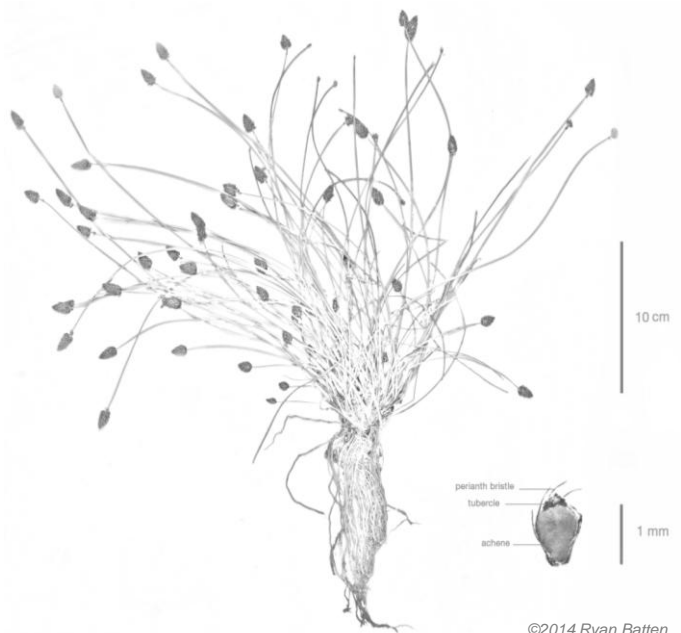


Figure 4 Photo of *Eleocharis ovata* herbarium specimen photo converted to line drawing

Eleocharis ovata (continued)

DESCRIPTION

General

- Tufted annual with fibrous roots, producing decumbent (rarely erect) stems 10 to 30 (40) cm tall

Leaves

- Leaves usually shorter than to slightly exceeding stems, with a small tooth 0.2 mm long at top of sheath (basal part of leaf that surrounds stem)

Flowers

- Spikelets ±oval-shaped, 2 to 8 mm long
- 25 to 100+ scales (which cover achene and stamens), usually orange-brown to purplish with a green central mid-vein and transparent margin, covering 2 (rarely 3) stamens with brown anthers
- Perianth bristles brownish, surpassing the tubercle (hat-like portion at top of achene)

Fruits

- Mature achenes golden-brown, 0.75 to 1 mm long by 0.6 to 0.85 mm wide
- Tubercles triangular, 0.3 to 0.5 mm high by 0.3 to 0.5 mm wide, usually narrower than the top of achene



Figure 5 Comparison of mature *Eleocharis* achenes showing perianth bristles (arrow)

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- May often occur with other *Eleocharis* species: when population numbers permit, collections with mature achenes are required to make reliable identification
- Most often confused with obtuse spike-rush (*E. obtusa*) and red-listed Engelmann's spike-rush (*E. engelmannii*); can be distinguished from these species by its narrower tubercles (less than $\frac{2}{3}$ the width of the achene; see Figure 5) and less strictly erect, usually arching stems



Figure 6 Oval spikelets showing mature achenes

GENERAL THREATS AND GUIDANCE

- **Avoid development in areas with known occurrences of *Eleocharis ovata* through project relocation or redesign**
- Protect marshes and wet meadows near ponds/lakes from disturbance and development, including exclusion of livestock and ATVs through fencing, and consider restoration including invasive plant removal following professional advice
- Ensure roadside maintenance activities do not disturb this species and its habitat
- Provincial methods for when and how to conduct plant species at risk surveys, as well as guidance on mitigation measures for this species can be found in *Guidance for Plant Species at Risk in the Okanagan: Foreshore, Riparian & Wetland Developments*
- Report any sightings to the BC Conservation Data Centre (cdccdata@gov.bc.ca) and MFLNRO Ecosystems Section (josie.symonds@gov.bc.ca)

REFERENCES

- BC Conservation Data Centre. 2014. <http://a100.gov.bc.ca/pub/eswp/>
- Smith, G. E. et. al. 1997. *Eleocharis*. In: Flora of North America Editorial Committee, eds. 1993+. Flora of North America North of Mexico. 16+ vols. New York and Oxford. Vol. 23, 103 pp
- Larson, B.M. and P.M. Catling. 1996. The separation of *Eleocharis obtusa* and *Eleocharis ovata* (Cyperaceae) in Eastern Canada. Can. J. Bot. 74: 238-242

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