

***Minuartia pusilla* (S. Wats.) Mattf. var. *pusilla***

annual sandwort  
Caryophyllaceae (Pink Family)

**Status:** State Review Group 1

**Rank:** G5T3T5SNR

**General Description:** Adapted from Hickman (1993), and Douglas et al (1993): *Minuartia pusilla* var. *pusilla* is a small, hairless annual 3/8 to 2 in. (1-5 cm) tall. The taproot is weak and thread-like. The stems are slender, solitary or few, simple or branched, and spreading to erect. The leaves are 1/16 to 3/16 (1.5-5 mm) long by less than 1/16 in. (0.2-1.5 mm) wide, narrow, and sharp-pointed. They are opposite, linear, and become few on the upper stem. The amount of stem visible between the leaves is much longer than the leaves themselves. The inflorescence consists of several flowers in an open, leafy-bracted cluster that is often the greater part of the plant height. The flower petals are small, 1-2 mm long and white, or may be lacking. The leafy flower bracts are lanceolate, long-pointed or sharp-pointed, less than 1/16 in. (2-3 mm) long, and 3-nerved. The fruits capsules are egg-shaped, 3-valved, and slightly shorter than the inflorescence. The seeds are purplish-brown, very small, and minutely pimply.

**Identification Tips:** This taxon keys to *Arenaria pusilla* in Hitchcock (1964). *Minuartia* is distinguished from *Arenaria* (as currently delineated) by its fruits with three valves, while *Arenaria* has fruit with six valves. This is the only variety of *M. pusilla* that occurs in Washington. Several other species of *Minuartia* may be found in Washington, but none of these occur in the same counties as *M. pusilla* var. *pusilla*. *M. pusilla* may be distinguished from the two annual species of *Arenaria*, *A. serpyllifolia* and *A. stricta*, by its glabrous herbage. Both *A. serpyllifolia* and *A. stricta* are glandular-hairy, at least on the upper stem.

**Phenology:** This taxon blooms from April through June, depending on elevation. Plants observed in mid-May had already finished flowering and fruiting.

**Range:** This taxon is known from British Columbia, south to California, Nevada, and Arizona. In Washington it has been found in Grant, Chelan, Whitman, Spokane, Walla Walla, and Klickitat counties.

**Habitat:** This taxon may be found in plains, open pine forest, chaparral slopes, and dry rock cliffs at an elevation of 25 to 7900 feet (8-2400 m) and was observed in Washington at an elevation

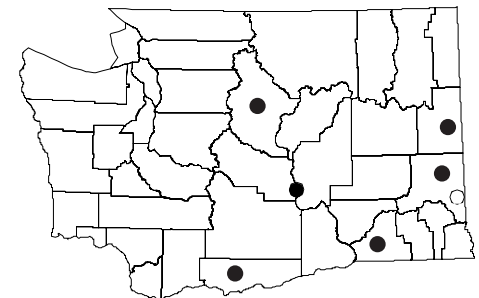
***Minuartia pusilla* var. *pusilla***

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Known distribution  
of *Minuartia pusilla*  
var. *pusilla*  
in Washington



● Current (1980+)  
○ Historic (older than 1980)

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of 800 feet (244 m). The following species have been found in association: curly bluegrass (*Poa secunda*), large-fruit desert parsley (*Lomatium macrocarpum*), western bottle-brush grass (*Elymus elymoides*), Carey's balsamroot (*Balsamorhiza careyana*), spring whitlow-grass (*Draba verna*), cheat grass (*Bromus tectorum*), grassy tar plant (*Madia gracilis*), scabland sagebrush (*Artemisia rigida*) and gray ball sage (*Salvia dorrii*).

**Ecology:** Like many annuals, this taxon may not be visible in years with low precipitation.

**State Status Comments:** This taxon is known from less than five occurrences in Washington. Because *Minuartia pusilla* var. *pusilla* was recently added to the Washington rare plant list, not much is known about the degree of its rarity in the state at this time.

**Inventory Needs:** Open, dry, and rocky sites within those counties with documented occurrences should be further investigated.

**Threats and Management Concerns:** The greatest threat to this species is damage from off road vehicles at some sites.

**Comments:** This species is described in the Hitchcock (1964) as *Arenaria pusilla*.

**References:**

Douglas, G.W., G.B. Straley, D. Meidinger, and J. Pojar. 1993. *Illustrated Flora of British Columbia* vol. 2: *Dicotyledons (Balsaminaceae Through Cuscutaceae)*. Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, Victoria, British Columbia. 475 pp.

Hickman, J.C. 1993. *The Jepson Manual: Higher Plants of California*. University of California Press, Berkeley. 1400 pp.

Hitchcock, C.L., A. Cronquist, M. Ownbey, J.W. Thompson. 1964. *Vascular Plants of the Pacific Northwest Part 2: Salicaceae to Saxifragaceae*. University of Washington Press, Seattle, WA. 597 pp.