

Altai Wild Rye

Leymus angustus

Common name: Altai Wild Rye

Scientific name: *Leymus angustus*

Family: Poaceae

Description

Altai Wild Rye is an Asian dune grass found throughout Mongolia, Siberia and China. In Canada, it is cultivated in many places but was previously only known to occur in the wild in Saskatchewan. This is a tall (100 cm) coarse grass that reproduces mainly by seed and forms dense tussocks from short rhizomes.

Range in Yukon

Known from Carcross where it was first reported in 1998. Small patches have been eradicated from the south Klondike Highway. It may have spread to the Alaska Highway and is also known from the BC portion of the Klondike Highway and along the Chilkoot Trail.

Similar Species

Sea Lyme Grass (*Leymus mollis*) and Hairy Lyme Grass (*Leymus innovatus*) are also large perennial grasses. Sea Lyme Grass is only native to the Yukon coast and has anthers 4-9 mm. Hairy Lyme Grass can be distinguished by having hairy glumes and anthers 3.5-10 mm whereas Altai Wild Rye has anthers 3-5 mm long; glumes glabrous, sometimes scabrous. Quack Grass (*Elymus repens*) is widely spread along roadsides and at reclamation projects; often found as a weed in commercial seed.

Ecological Impact

It is a dune stabilizing grass that could be a threat to the Carcross Dunes and the animals and plants that depend on the dune ecosystem. If it spreads along rivers, it could form dense mats that hinder succession and decrease biodiversity.

Control

All known Yukon infestations have been small and have been controlled by pulling prior to the seed maturing. Larger plants must be dug up; most of the roots are less than 30 cm deep. The seeds of wild rye continue to mature after pulling. You may put plants into clear garbage bags and then leave them in the sun to kill off the plants and roast the seeds. Herbicide control may be required in large populations.



Photo: Bruce Bennett