

## Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry

[DACF Home](#) → [Bureaus & Programs](#) → [Maine Natural Areas Program](#) → [Communities, Plants, and Animals](#) → [Rare Plants](#) → Astragalus alpinus

Maine Natural Areas Program



### *Astragalus alpinus* L. var *brunetianus* Fern.

#### Alpine Milk-vetch

- [State Rank \(rank.htm\)](#): S3
- [Global Rank \(rank.htm\)](#): G5T3
- [State Status \(rank.htm\)](#): Special Concern

**Habitat:** Calcareous ledges and gravels. [Non-tidal rivershore (non-forested, seasonally wet)]

**Range:** Restigouche River (Quebec and New Brunswick), St. John and Aroostook Rivers (Maine), Connecticut River (New Hampshire and Vermont). Typical variety occurs in arctic regions, south to Newfoundland.



**Aids to Identification:** Alpine milk-vetch is a loose, straggling plant restricted (in Maine) to a few river-shore areas. The compound leaves are composed of 5-11 pairs of oblong leaflets. The purplish-white, pea-like flowers are borne in a dense, short raceme (cluster). The legumes, or pods, are slender, curved and gradually tapering, and hairy. The stems are creeping, branching and may form mats up to a meter across. The falcate legume with a deep groove separates *Astragalus alpinus* from the other *Astragalus* species that occurred historically in Maine.

**Ecological characteristics:** This plant is both naturally restricted in its range and at its southern limit in Maine. At its known locations in Maine (along the St. John & Aroostook Rivers), it grows on gravelly banks or beaches where it is frequently subjected to ice-scouring and/or high water. Associates include other subarctic species here at their southern limit, such as *Hedysarum alpinum* var. *americanum*, *Tanacetum bipinnatum* ssp. *huronense*, and *Primula mistassinica*.

**Phenology:** In Maine, begins flowering in early June, continuing through July. Legumes mature late July through the fall.



**Family:** Fabaceae

**Synonyms:** *Astragalus alpinus* L. var *labradoricus* (DC.) Fern.

**Known Distribution in Maine:** This rare plant has been documented from a total of 15 town(s) in the following county(ies): Aroostook.

**Reason(s) for rarity:** Naturally restricted range, at southern limit of range, habitat declining.

**Conservation considerations:** Maintain hydrologic integrity of its rivershore habitat, including natural disturbance by water and ice. Populations could be harmed if all-terrain vehicle use of its habitat increases.

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## Contact Information

Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry  
22 State House Station  
18 Elkins Lane  
Augusta, ME 04333  
Phone: (207) 287-3200  
Fax: (207) 287-2400  
TTY: Maine Relay 711  
[dacf@maine.gov](mailto:dacf@maine.gov)  
[More Contacts](#)