

White fairy poppy

(*Meconella oregana*)



THREATENED



Flower (left), habit (center), and habitat (right) of white fairy poppy. Photos by ODA. If downloading images from this website, please credit the photographer.

Family

Papaveraceae

Plant description

Meconella oregana is a diminutive annual forb that is 2-16 cm tall with erect to ascending stems. The whorled basal leaves are 3-18 mm long, with a blade that's linear-spatulate (appearing to have an ~10 mm petiole) and entire margins, while stem leaves are opposite and sessile. The flower receptacle is shorter than broad and expands into a small ring beneath the sepals. The petals are white, 1-5 mm long, and alternately obovate and oblanceolate with a rounded apex. There are 4-6 stamens in one series (row) and the anthers are widely elliptic to round. The linear fruit capsules are 20-30 mm long with 0.5 mm seeds that are obovate-reniform.

When to survey

Surveys for *Meconella oregana* should be completed when the species is in flower between late February and mid-April, depending on seasonal weather conditions. Southern Oregon populations may have an extended bloom period.

Habitat

Meconella oregana is found in open and sunny grassy areas with minimal woody cover and shallow gravelly loam soils. The white fairy poppy commonly associates with bryophytes and small vascular annuals on gradual to steep slopes. Populations require seasonally moist soils, which are supplied primarily by vernal seeps that dry in summer. The exact habitat requirements are not well understood, and the habitat varies across the range of the species. In the British Columbia and Puget Sound, *M. oregana* prefers south-facing slopes, while plants in the Columbia Gorge and southern Oregon mostly

grow on north or west-facing slopes. In the Puget Sound, *M oregana* is restricted to *Quercus garryana* (Garry Oak) communities at or below 1,000 ft elevation. In the Columbia River Gorge, *M. oregana* is found in open savanna-like meadows and in openings within mixed Oregon white oak woodlands and sometimes coniferous forest dominated by *Pseudotsuga menziesii* and *Pinus ponderosa*, between 200 and 1,200 ft elevation. *Meconella oregana* plants in southern Oregon can be found in both meadow openings and rocky outcrops at higher elevation (1,300 to 2,600 ft), with *Ceanothus cuneatus* a commonly associated shrub. Besides vernal seeps, populations in southern Oregon can also be found near small streams or bare soil under large shrubs.

Range

White fairy poppy occurs in a series of disjunct populations from southwestern British Columbia to central California with the main concentrations located in Puget Sound, Columbia River Gorge, southern Oregon, and Contra Costa County in California.

Oregon counties

Hood River, Wasco, Douglas, and Jackson

Federal status

Species of concern

Threats

Habitat loss and degradation are the greatest threat to *Meconella oregana* survival, with residential and commercial development still a pressing concern. Encroachment of invasive weeds is a high priority threat in the Puget Sound, Columbia River Gorge, and southern Oregon population complexes. Most Oregon populations surveyed by ODA in 2008 were noted as having invasive weeds ranging from annual grasses to encroachment of invasive shrubs like *Cytisus scoparius*. Fire suppression can result in encroachment by woody shrubs (e.g., *Ceanothus cuneatus*) and trees that would otherwise be mitigated by regular fire intervals. Other threats to white fairy poppy include accidental recreational impacts, grazing, climate change, and issues related to small population size.

Conservation planning

Meconella oregana is currently listed as Endangered in Canada and the Parks Canada Agency developed a comprehensive recovery strategy in 2013.

References

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