

LONGLEAF FINGERGRASS

Digitaria gracillima (Scribn.) Fern.

Synonyms: none

Family: Poaceae (grass)

FNAI Ranks: G2/S2

Legal Status: US-none; FL-none



Longleaf fingergrass. © Brett Budach

Field Description: Plants perennial; in dense tufts, not rhizomatous. **Culms** 60 - 100 cm, erect. **Sheaths** villous, particularly the lower sheaths; ligules 0.2 - 0.4, fimbriate; blades to 47 cm long, 1 - 2.1 mm wide, involute, glabrous and smooth abaxially, scabrous adaxially, sometimes with a few long hairs near the base. **Panicles** of 2 - 3(5) spikelike primary branches on elongate rachises; primary branches 8 - 13(20) cm, narrowly winged, wings no more than 1/2 as wide as the midribs, bearing spikelets in unequally pedicellate groups of 3 - 4(5); secondary branches rarely present; longest pedicels to 5 mm. **Spikelets** 1.7 - 2.3 mm, elliptical, glabrous. **Lower** glumes absent; upper glumes 0.9 - 1 mm, less than 1/2 as long as the spikelets, 3-veined, glabrous, broadly rounded to truncate; lower lemmas slightly shorter than the spikelets, 5-veined, glabrous; upper lemmas smooth, brown when immature, dark brown at maturity (FNA 2003).

Similar Species: Slender crabgrass (*Digitaria filiformis* var. *filiformis*) is similar but differs in being an annual or short-lived perennial with culms 10 - 80 cm tall, 3 - 6 nodes and branched lower nodes; panicle branches 3 - 13 cm long, lemmas pubescent, upper glumes obtuse, with clavate to capitate hairs, and more than 1/2 as long as the spikelets; spikelets 1.3 - 1.9 mm long (FNA 2003). Shaggy crabgrass (*Digitaria villosa*) is characterized by plants 75 - 150 cm tall, basal leaf sheaths with papillose-based hairs; cauline blades 1 - 6 mm wide, flat; panicle branches 10 - 25 cm long; lower lemmas pubescent and spikelets 2 - 2.8 mm long (FNA 2003).

Related Rare Species: Lake Ella crabgrass (*Digitaria leucocoma*) is similar and differs from longleaf fingergrass by pubescent lower lemmas and upper glumes and lower lemmas with long glandular-tipped hairs along their margins and intracostal regions (FNA 2003). Baker's crabgrass (*Digitaria bakeri*) is also uncommon and was previously synonymized within longleaf fingergrass. It is characterized by culms with one to two unbranched nodes, acute upper glumes and upper glumes and lower lemmas glabrous over most of their length, sparsely pubescent near the apices, the hairs short, not glandular-tipped (FNA 2003).

Habitat: Florida scrub, longleaf pine sandhills, and dry pinelands.

Best Survey Season: Summer-fall.

Range-wide Distribution: Endemic to scrub, sandhill, and dry pinelands of central Florida.

Conservation Status: The species occurs in a very limited range, within central Florida, and is currently known with some measure of uncertainty from four locations. Virtually no information exists about the population size or viability of any of these known occurrences. Over the last 100 years, the species has likely seen significant declines in the area surrounding Lake Eustis, where George V. Nash (Coll. # 1192; NYBG 546634) originally described the species. The other known populations occur on conservation lands, where they are actively and appropriately managing the species habitat. Current short-term threats are relatively low as the element is known from several protected areas. It is not known why the element does not occur on numerous protected lands within central Florida, where scrub and sandhill natural communities are well-managed.

Protection and Management: It is most important to continue the appropriate application of prescribed fire management. Locating and treating invasive species within these habitats and avoiding broad spectrum herbicide treatments along roadsides and R-O-W corridors where the species may occur.

longleaf fingergrass

Digitaria gracillima

References: Flora of North America (FNA) 2003, Weakley, A. S. and the Southeastern Flora Team 2023, Wunderlin and Hansen 2011



Longleaf fingergrass panicle. © Brett Budach



Longleaf fingergrass sheath. © Brett Budach