

THICK-LEAVED WATER-WILLOW

Justicia crassifolia (Chapman) Chapman ex

Small

Synonyms: none

Family: Acanthaceae (acanthus)

FNAI Ranks: G3/S3

Legal Status: US-none FL-Endangered

Wetland Status: US-OBL+ FL-OBL



Jenna Annis

Field Description: **Herbaceous perennial** with glabrous stems. **Leaves** are opposite, narrow, up to 10 cm long, and slightly succulent with sides folded up. **Flowers** are 0.5 - 1.2 inches long and born on few-flowered spikes that are terminal or axillary. The green calyx has narrow sepals typical of Acanthaceae. Petals are lavender to purple and united into a tubular, bilaterally symmetrical corolla. The lower lip of the corolla has a white and purple crest. **Fruit** is a long, narrow capsule.

Similar Species: Thick-leaved water-willow can be distinguished from other *Justicia* species by its more narrow leaves, larger flowers, and habitat.

Related Rare Species: Cooley's waterwillow (*Justicia cooleyi*), federally and state-endangered, occurs in mesic hardwood hammocks over limestone. Leaves are hairy, not succulent. Flowers about 0.5 inch long, dark pink with purple and white

thick-leaved water-willow*Justicia crassifolia*

spots. Flowers in zigzag, usually 2-branched clusters on long stalks emerging from angle of leaf and stem.

Habitat: Wet flatwoods, bogs, and cypress swamps; this species commonly prefers open, sunny wet prairies and flatwoods with abundant wiregrass. May also be found in shallow ditches along roadsides.

Best Survey Season: Spring-summer.

Range-wide Distribution: Endemic to the lowlands of the Apalachicola River floodplain.

Conservation Status: This species does not tolerate deep shade and/or alterations of hydrology. Primary threats are intense forestry management and pine plantation development.

Protection and Management: Prescribed burning of historic wet prairies and flatwoods every 2-3 years should promote the open, grassy habitat that favors thick-leaved water-willow.

References: Clewell 1985, Kral 1983, Wunderlin and Hansen 2011, Wunderlin et al. 2018.