Peter's Mountain Mallow

Iliamna corei

Description

The Peter's Mountain mallow is one of eight species of the genus *Iliamna* in North America. Six are found in western North America and two are found isolated in the East. *Iliamna corei* is an erect, herbaceous perennial with maplelike leaves normally arranged alternately, with margins entire to serrate. Similar in appearance to the hollyhock, *I. corei* can produce 15 to 20 flowers during its blooming season, which extends from June to August. Normally pink to rose, the odorless flowers, 2 in. in diameter, are actinomorphic and either are found in determinate cymose inflorescences or are solitary and axillary. The corolla is composed of five distinct, obovate, asymmetric petals attached to the base of the staminal column.

Distribution

The Peter's Mountain mallow is a globally rare species, known only from the Narrows, a site on Peter's Mountain, in Giles County, Virginia. A similar mallow, *I. remota,* is found in Allegheny and Bedford counties.

Habitat

The plant grows in direct sunlight on shallow sandstone outcrops on the northwest slope of the mountain near the ridge line, approximately 3,000 ft. above sea level. The mountain is hardwood-dominated. Pitch pine (*Pinus rigida*) is also present, but now, in the absence of the natural fires that once allowed it to be more prevalent, it cannot compete with less fire-intolerant hardwoods and so grows mainly on the rocky outcrops.

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Peter's Mountain mallow

Life History

When *Iliamna corei* was discovered in 1927, the population numbered only 50 plants. By 1992 the species had declined to only three plants. While the exact cause of this dramatic decline is not known, threats to the species include grazing by deer (and in one case, a feral goat), competition with other plants (particularly the Canadian leafcup, *Polymnia canadensis*), shading by trees, the proximity of hiking trails, and fire suppression.

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Iliamna corei, protected from grazing

Cross-pollination is required for development of viable seeds in *I. corei.* While its seeds are durable and have been shown to be viable after six years, scarification of the seed is required for germination. Fire also plays an important role in stimulating germination.

Conservation

The Peter's Mountain mallow is listed as state and federally endangered.

The Nature Conservancy of Virginia purchased the 398-acre Narrows Preserve specifically to protect *Iliamna corei.* Management and monitoring by the Conservancy and its partners are improving the survival chances of the species. Activities include caging plants to reduce herbivory, thinning the overstory, prescribed burns (It responded positively to a prescribed burn in 2001 and a small natural fire in 2004), removing competitors, eradicating invasive species such as the garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*), and, to reduce herbivory, encouragement of deer hunting by special authorization.

Seed banking is also being explored by the North Carolina Botanical Garden, Virginia Tech, and the University of Virginia's Blandy Experimental Farm.

Virginia Natural Heritage

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation's Division of Natural Heritage maintains a database of rare species, populations and natural communities in the commonwealth, and manages the State natural Area Preserve System. Natural Heritage biologists, stewardship, and protection staff can answer landowners' questions about rare species and sensitive habitats. The staff also provides information and expertise on conservation and management practices that help ensure that we preserve our rich natural heritage and pass it on to future Virginians.

To learn more about Virginia's rare plant and animal species and rich biological communities, visit the website of the Division of Natural Heritage, at *www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage*

For additional information on the Peter's Mountain mallow, see NatureServe Explorer: Iliamna corei

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