

FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

The Yellowstone Sand Verbena



Photo: NPS

A WILDFLOWER IN NEED

The Yellowstone Sand Verbena (*Abronia ammophila*) is a trailing, branched perennial plant with sticky stems and clusters of many small creamy white flowers. It is found only on a narrow band of sandy shoreline on Yellowstone Lake in Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming near Pelican Creek and three other locations on the west side of the lake. It is located in open, sunny sites on sand with widely spaced vegetation just above the maximum splash zone. There is one known population of the sand verbena, found in four locations, with a total of approximately 8,000 individuals. One of these locations contains 96 percent of all known plants. The smallest of the subpopulations may have disappeared due to recreation.

PROTECTING THE VERBENA'S HABITAT

Despite its presence in a national park, the Yellowstone Sand Verbena faces threats from shoreline recreation and campground development. An additional danger is drought. Another imperiled, but not yet federally protected plant in Yellowstone National Park is Ross's Bentgrass (*Agrostis rossiae*). Park botanists have recommended federal protection for the verbena, and the bentgrass was first recognized as requiring federal protection in 1975.

KNOW YOUR VERBENA

- Deep-rooted: the Sand Verbena is a perennial plant, the taproots of which may reach more than 1.5 feet in large individuals.
- Lounging on the Beach: the sand verbena grows prostrate, generally less than a few inches above the surface of the sand. Most of the plant is sticky, causing it to be nearly entirely coated in sand.
- Slipping Through the Cracks: the Fish & Wildlife Service once considered this wildflower a candidate for federal protection, but it dropped off the radar screen in 1996.

CLIMATE CHAOS

The climate crisis may harm the Yellowstone Sand Verbena through extended and more severe droughts and by influencing Yellowstone Lake levels.

