

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
EAST LANSING, MICHIGAN

MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS  
CADILLAC, MICHIGAN

and

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
LANSING, MICHIGAN

NOTICE OF RELEASE OF SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN GERMPLASM BIG BLUESTEM  
SOURCE IDENTIFIED CLASS OF NATURAL GERMPLASM

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) announce the release of a source identified ecotype of big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii* Vitman) for the Great Lakes region.

As a source identified release, this plant will be referred to as Southwest Michigan Germplasm big bluestem to document its original collection locations. Southwest Michigan Germplasm big bluestem is released as a source identified type of certified seed (natural track). It is a composite release that has been assigned the NRCS accession 9084510.

This alternative release procedure is justified because sources and supplies of Michigan ecotype big bluestem are very limited and unable to meet the demand for this product. Propagation material of this ecotype is needed for ecosystem restoration and enhancement. The potential for immediate use is extremely high.

**Collection Site Information:** Seed was collected from native stands (as designated by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division) of big bluestem within the southern half of Michigan's lower peninsula. Original accession numbers and site locations are listed in *Attachment A*.

**Ecotype Description:** Southwest Michigan Germplasm big bluestem is a composite of several big bluestem collections and has features consistent with the species. It is a perennial, warm season bunch grass with short, scaly rhizomes. Stems are erect, pithy and can reach a height of 8 feet. It is very leafy at the base lessening considerably up the stem. Leaf blades have long, silky hairs that are widely dispersed on the upper surface. Plants bear 2-6 racemes at the tip of the culms, and usually some smaller inflorescences from the leaf axils.

**Ecological Considerations and Evaluations:** Southwest Michigan Germplasm big bluestem is native Michigan plant material that has undergone no purposeful selection therefore should not differ in rate of spread, seed production, vigor nor behavior from naturally occurring big bluestem in this area. Southwest Michigan Germplasm was determined "OK to release" when evaluated through the "Environmental Evaluation of NRCS Plant Releases" worksheet.

**Anticipated Conservation Use:** The anticipated uses of Southlow Michigan Germplasm include providing food/cover for wildlife, increasing species diversity, controlling erosion and restoring native plant environments.

Big bluestem attracts insects and provides seed that are used as food sources by songbirds, gamebirds and small mammals. Many wildlife species also utilize big bluestem for nesting, escape and winter cover. As this is a native plant species and composite it will be useful as a component in the restoration and diversification of native habitats, particularly Southern Michigan, its source of origin. Because of big bluestem's massive root system it may also be useful in combination with other native warm and cool season grasses for erosion control.

**Anticipated Area of Adaptation:** This species is found in dry to moist open areas throughout much of the United States, and a major component of tall and mixed grass prairies. Southlow Michigan Germplasm's anticipated area of adaptation is the Northeastern US, but likely will be used primarily in the southern half of Michigan's lower peninsula.

**Availability of Plant Materials:** Seed stock of Southlow Michigan Germplasm big bluestem will be maintained cooperatively by the USDA NRCS Rose Lake Plant Materials Center and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and made available to qualified parties for increase purposes. To request seed or further information contact:

USDA NRCS

David Burgdorf

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**References:**

Pohl, R. W. 1978. How to Know the Grasses. William C. Brown Company Publishers. Dubuque, IA. 200 p.

Voss, E. G. 1972. Michigan Flora Part 1: Gymnosperms and Monocots. Cranbrook Institute of Science. Bloomfield Hills, MI. 488 p.

**Prepared by:**

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**Signatures for release of:**

**Southlow Michigan Germplasm big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii* Vitman)**

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Ronald C. Williams, State Conservationist  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
East Lansing, Michigan

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Date

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K. L. Cool, Director  
Michigan Department of Natural Resources  
Lansing, Michigan

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Date

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Diane Gelburd, Ecological Sciences Division Director  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Washington, D.C.

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Date

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Marilyn Shy, Executive Director  
Michigan Association of Conservation Districts  
Cadillac, MI

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Date

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**Attachment A: Southlow Michigan Germplasm Big Bluestem Accessioning and Collection Site Information**