

Baby's Breath on Minnesota Point

The invasive plant baby's breath (*Gypsophila paniculata*) is found on the dunes of Minnesota Point. Once plants escape cultivated fields and gardens, they can become problematic.

Identification:

Baby's breath is a perennial plant originally from Europe and western Asia. Plants have multiple stems, a rounded shape, and are often about the size of a large suitcase. Flowers are small and white with five petals and grow in branched clusters. Leaves are bluish-green and smooth, growing opposite one another on the stem. Visit [Minnesota Wildflowers' page on baby's breath](#) for help with identification and more information about baby's breath.



Plants with rounded shape



Small, 5-petaled flowers



Smooth, opposite leaves

Why it's a problem:

Plants can produce up to 14,000 seeds and stems can break off and tumble, spreading seeds as they move. Invasive species spread rapidly and take over space originally occupied by native species. In the case of Minnesota Point, native species also include several state-listed rare species. There are examples from other coastal dune systems along the Great Lakes where baby's breath has displaced native vegetation and now comprises 25 - 80% of all vegetation.

What you can do:

Don't introduce baby's breath (or any other invasive species) into yards, gardens, or natural areas, and don't pick baby's breath for use in bouquets (which can unintentionally spread seed). You can help us to document all the baby's breath on the Point by mapping plants you find using the EDDMapS mobile app. With an accurate map of locations, it is easier to collaborate and organize removal of the baby's breath.

Where it's found:

The largest infestations we know of on Minnesota Point are on the dunes near the Sky Harbor Airport. Smaller pockets of baby's breath are found in other locations along the Point and not all of it has been documented yet.

Baby's Breath Management

You can help to protect the Minnesota Point dunes from invasive baby's breath. The goals are to: 1) Remove all baby's breath plants on Minnesota Point and, 2) Reduce introduction of new baby's breath seed sources from landscape plants and/or seed mixes.

Management Considerations:

- Do not remove plants without permission from the landowner.
- Time removal efforts when baby's breath plants are identifiable but before they have gone to seed. Typical flowering occurs in July on MN Point. Ideal project timing is late June-mid-July. Management happening later in the season should use extra precaution when bagging collection material to contain seed.
- Avoid trampling and uprooting any native vegetation, including American beachgrass (*Ammophila breviligulata* ssp. *breviligulata*) and beach heather (*Hudsonia tomentosa*), which are both state threatened species.



American Beachgrass



Beach Heather



Gently re-plant vegetation

- If American beachgrass roots get disturbed as baby's breath is being uprooted, gently press the rhizome (horizontal rooting stem) and root hair material back down into the sand, cover with sand, and loosely pat sand around the area of disturbance to minimize impact to native vegetation. See image above.
- Use existing trails, if possible, to avoid trampling native vegetation. If no trails exist, then spread out while working in the dunes to minimize trampling of native vegetation.
- **Poison Ivy** is prevalent in this area. Use existing trails, if possible, to avoid exposure. Long pants, long sleeves, and gloves are recommended. Wash skin and clothing with soap as soon as possible after working in areas of poison ivy.



Poison ivy plants



Poison ivy berries
(Photo credit Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org)

Baby's Breath Management

Tools needed:

- Sharp spade shovel
 - Hand pruners or scissors
 - Garbage bags
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STEP 1:

Learn to identify baby's breath and locate baby's breath on Minnesota Point. Check the [EDDMapS map](#) and determine the landowner of the area you'd like to work in. Obtain permission from the landowner to remove plants. Do not perform management without permission.

STEP 2:

Using hand pruners, cut stems near the base of the plant and place stems into a garbage bag. Try to contain any seeds inside the bag.

STEP 3:

Using a sharp spade shovel, dig into the sand below the base of the stem cluster and cut the tap root at least 6-8 inches below ground. Pull it out of the sand to ensure that the root is completely cut.



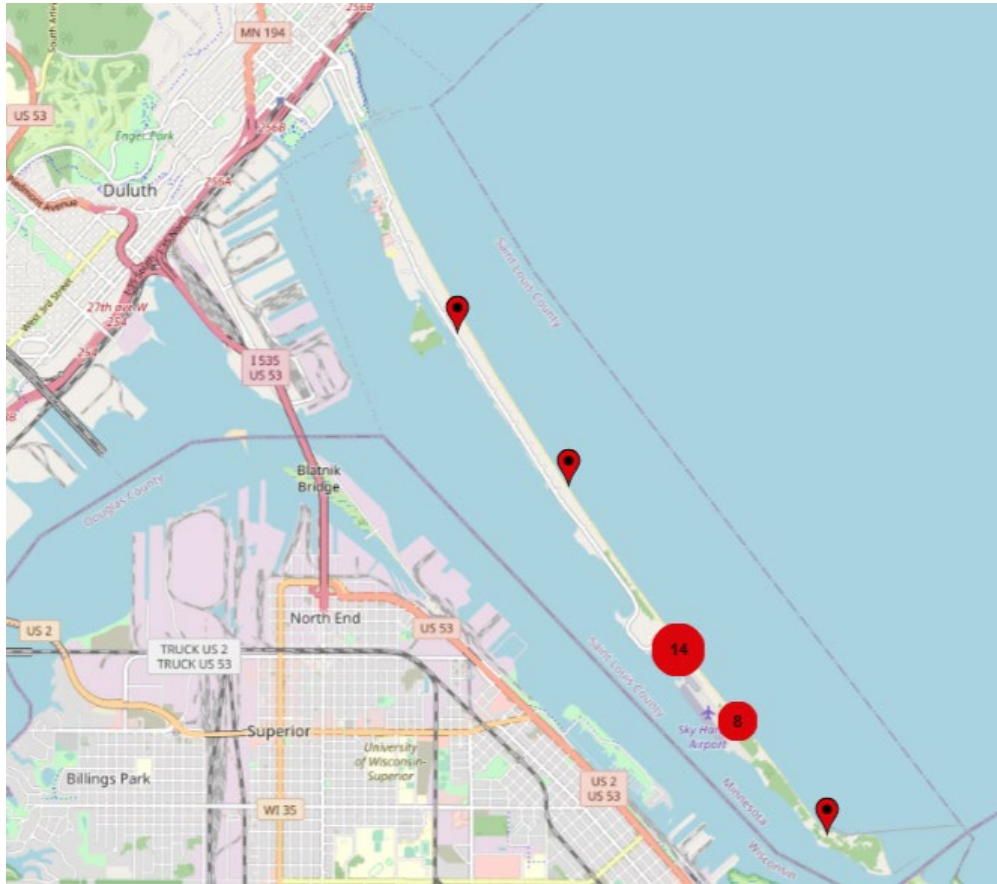
*The taproot of baby's breath plants is very thick and long.
Try to sever it at least 6-8 inches below the surface of the ground.*

STEP 4:

Any bags with collected material should be tied, labeled as "invasive plants", and brought to the Western Lake Superior Sanitary District (WLSSD) yard waste site.

Baby's breath can also be managed by burning individual plants with a propane torch in the spring (burning near poison ivy is NOT recommended) or foliar spraying plants with herbicide. It is recommended that additional guidance be sought for either of these methods given the sensitive nature of the habitat, adjacency to rare species, and proximity to water.

Baby's Breath Documented Locations



Map caption: [Baby's breath locations on Minnesota Point in EDDMapS](#) as of October 2, 2023. Early Detection & Distribution Mapping System. The University of Georgia - Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health.

Minnesota Point has not been fully surveyed for baby's breath. If you'd like to help record locations of baby's breath, download the [EDDMapS mobile app](#).

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