



# 'Service' Big Bluegrass

## *Poa secunda* (*Poa ampla*)

### Uses: Revegetation and Landscape Throughout Southern Alaska

#### Background Information

Big bluegrass, *Poa secunda*, is hardy in cold regions and is found in open meadows on dry, gravelly, or rocky soil (USDA, NRCS, 2004).

Plant taxonomists make life difficult for those of us that want to know which plant is which. Hultén (1968) described a grass called *Poa ampla*. He said it occurs naturally outside Alaska in the Yukon.

Now, taxonomists have clumped a few *Poa*'s into one species—*Poa secunda*. As a result, big bluegrass can be found in Alaska now. The synonyms for *Poa secunda* that Hultén described are: *Poa ampla*, *P. Canbyi*, *P. nevadensis*, and *P. stenantha*.

**Science is never static.  
It is constantly changing!**



Map from Hultén, 1968.  
Used with the permission of Stanford University Press.  
Revised by the Alaska Plant Materials Center in 2004 to reflect scientific name change/distribution.

#### Distribution

*Poa secunda* is native to Alaska. Big bluegrass can be found in the wild from Southeastern Alaska, through the Yukon to Nebraska.

**'Service' Big Bluegrass is recognized as an informal release.**

**Seed is maintained by the Alaska Plant Materials Center.**

#### Growth

Big bluegrass is a native bunch grass. It grows 18—24 inches tall with a characteristic blue color. It is a perennial and a cool season grass.

*Poa secunda* begins growth after snowmelt. Usually by mid-July it is mature with yellow, brown flower and seed spikes.

It is resistant to flattening (lodging). Yields of clean seed run about 200 pounds per acre.

#### Cultivar: 'Service'

*Plant Introduction Number: 387931*

'Service' was developed and released by The Alaska Plant Materials Center in 1989 (Wright, 1989).

'Service' big bluegrass is useful for its hardiness.

The original seed for 'Service' was collected along the Alaska Highway near Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, Canada.

'Service' has been evaluated by the Alaska Plant Materials Center since 1979.

'Service' big bluegrass is more vigorous and hardier in Alaskan climates than other *Poa secunda* cultivars (Wright, 1989).

#### Interesting Note

'Service' big bluegrass is named for Robert Service, an author well-known in Alaska for his writings of fictional gold rush characters.

July 23, 2007



# 'Service' Big Bluegrass

## 'Service' for Alaska Revegetation and Landscape Purposes

'Service' big bluegrass thrives on various soils and moisture regimes. Although it is a bunch grass it has a competitive fibrous root system which enables it to compete well with weeds.

'Service' leaves are a bluish color. With its height of about 2 feet, it is attractive from a distance.

Other cultivars of big bluegrass are used in many of the western states. 'Service' can survive in Alaska's climate, whereas the other cultivars die.



'Service' Big Bluegrass seed  
~1,046,960 seeds per pound

### To Produce 'Service' Big Bluegrass

'Service' performs best on dry, gravelly, or rocky soil. Common farm equipment works well. Drill seed ~ 1/2 inch deep. Plant seed while ground temperatures are cool.

'Service' has a long lifespan. Cultivation of weeds will prolong "weed free" harvests for many years.

Harvesting seed is relatively easy because of its growth habit and resistance to lodging. Yields of clean seed are about 200 pounds per acre (Wright, 1989).



'Service' production at the  
Plant Materials Center in Palmer, Alaska.

### 'Service' plant characteristics

<b>Wetness Tolerance</b>	<b>good</b>
<b>Acidity Tolerance</b>	<b>moderate</b>
<b>Seedling Vigor</b>	<b>moderate</b>
<b>Yield Potential</b>	<b>high</b>
<b>Longevity</b>	<b>long</b>
<b>Seed Production</b>	<b>moderate</b>
<b>Drought Resistance</b>	<b>high</b>
<b>Winter Hardiness</b>	<b>good</b>
<b>Root System</b>	<b>bunch</b>
<b>Palatability</b>	<b>fair</b>

(USDA, NRCS, 2004).

**Peggy Hunt & Stoney Wright**  
**State of Alaska**  
**Department of Natural Resources**  
**Division of Agriculture**  
**Plant Materials Center**  
**5310 S. Bodenburg Spur Rd.**  
**Palmer, AK 99645-9706**  
**Phone: (907) 745-4469**

### References

Hultén, E. 1968. *Flora of Alaska and Neighboring Territories*. © by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Jr. University, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

USDA, NRCS. 2004. *The PLANTS Database*, Version 3.5 (<http://plants.usda.gov>). [National Plant Data Center](#), Baton Rouge, LA 70874-4490 USA.

Wright, S. 1989. *Notice of Naming and Release of 'Service' Big Bluegrass*. Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Agriculture, Plant Materials Center, Palmer, Alaska.