

## **Willowleaf Aster (*Symphotrichum praealtum* Var. *praealtum*)**

### **Status and Protection**

Willowleaf Aster is listed as a threatened species and receives protection in Ontario under the *Endangered Species Act, 2007* (ESA) and in Canada under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). Protection prohibits actions such as killing, harming, possessing, selling or trading of the plant.

### **Description**

This native perennial plant can grow up to 150 centimetres (cm) tall and has a smooth and somewhat waxy stem that branches occasionally. The larger stems are occasionally reddish, and have lines of white hairs. The alternate leaves are 7 to 13 cm long and 8 to 18 millimetres (mm) wide, becoming smaller and narrower as they ascend up the stems. They are lanceolate, narrowly ovate, or linear, and have smooth margins. Underneath, the leaves are whitish-green with a reticulate network of fine veins that is quite conspicuous. There are many daisy-like composite flowers near the top of the plant, forming a tall, pyramid-like cluster. Each flower has 20 - 30 lavender, light blue, or white ray florets surrounding numerous yellow disk florets that eventually become reddish purple. The blooming period occurs from early to mid-fall, and lasts about a month. There is no noticeable floral scent. Willowleaf Aster often spreads vegetatively to form small to large colonies.<sup>i</sup>



### **Distribution**

Willowleaf Aster is common in the midwestern United States and reaches its northeastern range limits in southwestern Ontario. The variety of Willowleaf Aster (*Var. praealtum*) that is found in Ontario occurs from Ontario west to Nebraska and south to Texas and Florida west of the Appalachian Mountains and adjacent foothills and plateaus.<sup>ii</sup> Willowleaf Aster occurs in two main areas of concentration in southwestern Ontario: the City of Windsor and Walpole Island.<sup>iii</sup>

### **Habitat**

Willowleaf Aster is found on wet, loamy and sandy soils, including fields abandoned from agriculture, streambanks, lake shores, recent clearings, open thickets, oak savannahs, open woods, ditches, roadsides, railroads, meadows, and prairies.<sup>iv</sup>

i - iv - URS Corporation and LGL Limited. 2009. Willowleaf Aster (*Symphotrichum praealtum* var. *praealtum*) Impact Assessment Report for the Detroit International River Crossing Study.