

ALASKA

## DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE/PLANT MATERIALS CENTER  
... PRACTICAL PLANT TECHNOLOGY FOR THE NORTH

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NOTICE OF NAMING AND RELEASE  
OF  
'SERVICE' BIG BLUEGRASS

Scientific Name: Poa ampla Merrill

Common Name: Big Bluegrass

Cultivar: 'Service' - This variety name was selected to honor Robert Service the Canadian poet and novelist who is remembered in Alaska and the Yukon Territory for his writings of fictional, gold rush characters.

Other Identification Numbers: P.I. 387931

Origin: The Alaska Plant Materials Center obtained the seed of P.I. 38793 in 1979 through the National Plant Introduction System. The collection notes indicate that the accession was collected by Dr. William Pringle with the Prince George Experimental Station in British Columbia, Canada in 1968.

The collection site is listed as being on the Alaska Highway east of Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada. Initial increase of the accession occurred at Beltsville, Maryland prior to distribution through the Plant Introduction System.

Description and Occurrence: 'Service' Big bluegrass is an erect perennial bunch grass. At Palmer, the variety grows 18 - 24 inches tall. 'Service' Big bluegrass has blue coloration, more so than 'Sherman' Big bluegrass. This distinctive coloration and erect form makes 'Service' easily recognizable. The variety is very stemmy and has few leaves. The seed heads mature to a straw color.

The main growth region for Big bluegrass is the western great plains and Rocky Mountains of the United States and Canada, north to British Columbia and Alberta. The southern limit is New Mexico and Arizona. A relatively small, disjunct population of Big bluegrass occurs in the south central Yukon Territory of Canada. Taxonomists working with the population state that this population is a natural range extension.

Development: 'Service' Big bluegrass has been evaluated by the Alaska Plant Materials Center at Palmer, Alaska since 1979. The accession has proven superior to 'Sherman' Big bluegrass, the only other known commercial cultivar in the species. In trials throughout Alaska, 'Service' Big bluegrass has consistently surpassed 'Sherman' in vigor and hardiness. The off-site evaluation at 24 sites began in 1983 and continues to date. Seed increase started in 1981 and the first large-scale increase occurred in 1985.

**Use:** Part of the responsibilities of the North Latitude Revegetation and Seed Production Project is to develop new cultivars for erosion control, reclamation and habitat enhancement. Therefore, during the development of 'Service' Big bluegrass, testing was limited to these potential uses. Grazing value or forage production were not considered.

The release of 'Service' Big bluegrass breaks with Plant Materials Center tradition because the species is not native to Alaska. The market for 'Service' Big Bluegrass may be somewhat limited because many reclamation projects, particularly mine reclamation, will not allow the use of non-native species. It will, however, find demand in highway and construction related revegetation. An added market will be outside of Alaska in areas where Big bluegrass is desired, especially those northern areas where 'Sherman' Big bluegrass is not hardy.

Because of the variety's blue coloration and erect growing habit, a small market may also develop in the landscape sector.

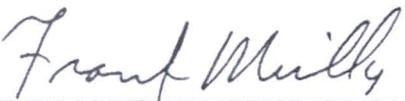
**Areas of Adaptation:** Big bluegrass is not native to Alaska, therefore extensive off-site testing is critical in determining areas of use. Based on evaluations, 'Service' Big bluegrass can be expected to produce acceptable results from the Yukon River south through the Aleutian Islands. Testing is not complete in southeast Alaska and recommendation for that region is presently being withheld.

Within these areas, 'Service' Big bluegrass tends to perform best on dry, gravelly or rocky soil.

**Seed Characteristics and Production:** Harvesting 'Service' Big bluegrass presents no major problem. The growth habit and resistance to lodging makes Big bluegrass relatively easy to harvest. Yields of clean seed generally run on average 200 pounds per acre. Harvest at Palmer has usually been completed by the last week in July.

**Increase and Distribution:** 'Service' Big bluegrass seed will be recognized in breeder, foundation, registered and certified seed classes. Breeder and foundation seed will be grown and maintained for the present time at the Alaska Plant Materials Center. Foundation class seed will be available to seed growers through the Alaska Seed Growers, Inc. (formerly the Alaska Crop Improvement Association). Interested growers should contact either the Alaska Plant Materials Center or Alaska Seed Growers, Inc.

**Approved By:**

  
Frank Mielke, Director  
Division of Agriculture

12/13/89  
Date

  
Lennie Gorsuch, Commissioner  
Alaska Department of Natural Resources

12/24  
Date