Sedge Meadow

Tussock Sedge Meadow

State Rank S4

Community Description

These graminoid marshes are dominated by hummocks of tussock sedge interspersed with bluejoint, other graminoids, and a few shrubs. Shrub cover is usually less than 30% but may occasionally be higher; meadowsweet is a characteristic shrub. Other wetland sedges and grasses are scattered in with the tussock sedge and bluejoint, usually in small amounts. Plant species vary from site to site but typically include royal fern, cinnamon fern, sensitive fern, St. Johnswort, flat-topped white aster, or wool-grass. Bryophytes are usually very sparse.

Soil and Site Characteristics

Soils are saturated and usually flooded, sometimes only seasonally. Soils may be entirely organic peat or muck, or a layer of organic matter over mineral soil. Standing water is present through much of the growing season. This type typically occurs in large flat basins that are often associated with drainage streams and may be influenced by beaver activity.

Mulberrywing

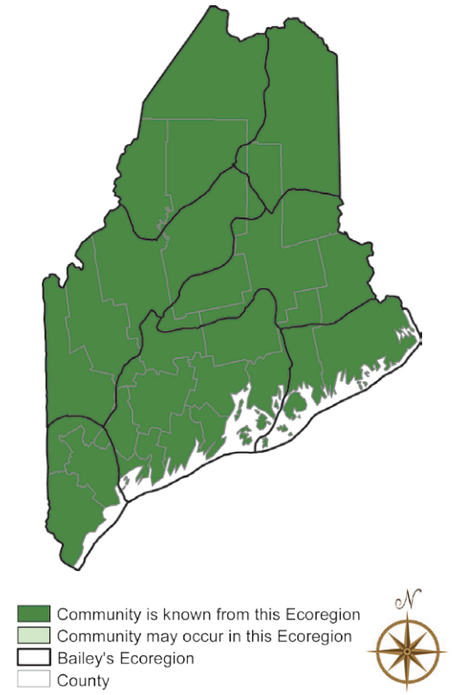
Diagnostics

Tussock sedge forms greater than 30% cover (usually >50%); shrub cover usually is less than 30%. Vegetation is strongly hummocked with standing water between hummocks for much of the growing season.

Similar Types

Bluejoint Meadows share many species but have lower abundance of tussock sedge and are usually only temporarily flooded. Sweetgale Mixed Shrub Fens and Alder Shrub Thickets can also share species with this type but are more strongly dominated by shrubs (>25% shrub or dwarf shrub cover, and usually >50%), and with <25% cover of tussock sedge. Mixed Graminoid-Shrub Marshes also have <25% tussock sedge.

Location Map



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Conservation, Wildlife, and Management Considerations

While graminoid marshes are common throughout the state, the Tussock Sedge Meadow type of graminoid marsh is more restricted in its distribution. Several are known from public lands and private conservation lands, including some very large and intact examples. Maintaining appropriate wetland buffers can help ensure that adjacent land uses do not result in degradation. This wetland type is particularly susceptible to alteration from the non-native purple loosestrife.

The rare Tomah mayfly is found in a few large sedge meadows in central, eastern, and northern Maine. In addition to numerous common bird species, the rare sedge wren nests in graminoid marshes and wet meadows. Northern harriers may also nest and forage in these meadows. Northern leopard frogs forage in large grassy meadows associated with watercourses in mid-summer. Some sites may function as vernal pools, which are important breeding habitat for a variety of amphibians including wood frogs, spotted salamanders, and blue-spotted salamanders. In southern Maine, these wetlands may provide foraging habitat for ribbon snakes, Blanding's turtles, and spotted turtles.

Characteristic Plants

These plants are frequently found in this community type. Those with an asterisk are often diagnostic of this community.

Sapling/shrub
Meadowsweet*
Speckled alder*
Winterberry*

Dwarf Shrub
Leatherleaf

Herb
Bluejoint*
Tussock sedge*

Bryoid
Sphagnum mosses

Associated Rare Plants

Bog bedstraw

Associated Rare Animals

Blanding's turtle
Comet darner
Least bittern
Ribbon snake
Sedge wren
Short-eared owl
Spotted turtle
Tomah mayfly
Yellow rail

Distribution

Statewide, extending throughout the northeastern U.S.; Canadian distribution unknown.

Landscape Pattern: Large Patch

Examples on Conservation Lands You Can Visit

- Cold Stream, Passadumkeag – Penobscot Co.
- Great Heath Public Lands – Washington Co.
- Middle Pond State Park – Oxford Co.
- Roberts Pond Inlet, Massabesic Experimental Forest – York Co.

Maine Natural Areas Program