

Acidic Graminoid Fen - Spillway Fen

State Rank: SNR - Not Ranked



Acidic Graminoid Fen - Spillway Fen, early spring. Photo: Matthew Hickler.

Description: Acidic Graminoid Fen - Spillway Fens are shallow acidic peatlands with mixed graminoid/herbaceous vegetation that develop on spillway bedrock channels associated with large dams. The spillway channel bottoms have groundwater seepage that keeps the coarse mineral soil substrate saturated most of the time. The habitat is wholly man-made and actively managed to control woody vegetation through annual herbicide or mowing treatment. The management produces small patches of high mortality of a minute proportion of

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the fen each year that may play an important role in the observed patch dynamics and species diversity in the community.

Characteristic

Species: Species of sphagnum moss are the most common plants in all acidic peatlands. The vascular plants of the Acidic Graminoid Fen - Spillway Fen include peatland species and species more typical of

disturbed areas such as river or lake shores or wet gravel pits. Species shared with Acidic Graminoid Fens include sedges, tawny cotton-grass, round-leaved sundew, and rose pogonia. Horsetails including variegated scouring rush may



Round-leaved sundew, often found in AGF - Spillway Fen. Photo: Bryan Connolly, NHESP.

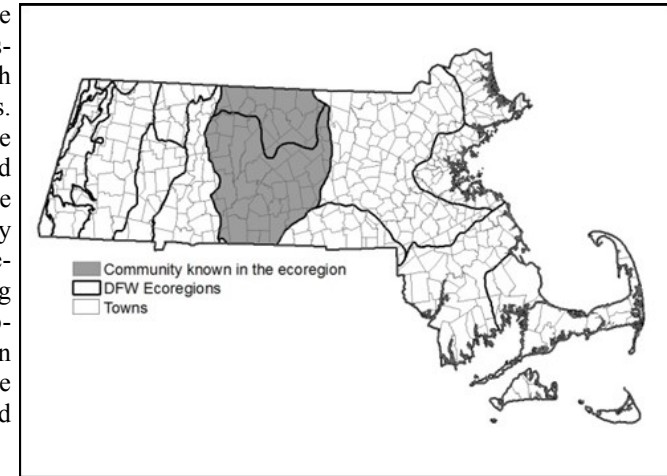
cover substantial areas of the habitat. Canadian St. John's-wort and spreading bulrush occur at both reported sites. Both sites included multiple members of the sedge and grass families. One site included several regionally uncommon (but not State-Listed) species including alpine clubsedge, swamp-thistle, and northeastern willow-herb along with large populations of orchid species.

Differentiating from Related Communities:

Spillway Fens are restricted to the spillways of large dams - any sphagnum dominated areas in spillways would be considered to be a Spillway Fen, a cultural variant of Acidic Graminoid Fen. The species are similar to those of other Acidic Graminoid Fens.

Habitat for Associated Fauna:

Due to the extended periods of saturation, lack of nutrients, and the high acidity and low oxygen content of the water, acidic peatlands are inhospitable to many animal species. Spillway Fens, being on spillways of large dams, are not likely to be used as habitat by many of the wide ranging, large species that are found in other acidic peatlands. Many species of dragonflies and damselflies inhabit acidic peatlands, especially where there is adjacent open water.



Examples with Public Access:

Tully Lake property (USACE), Athol; Barre Falls Dam property (USACE), Barre.



Acidic Graminoid Fen - Spillway Fen mixed vegetation with yellow flowering horned bladderwort. Photo: Matthew Hickler.

