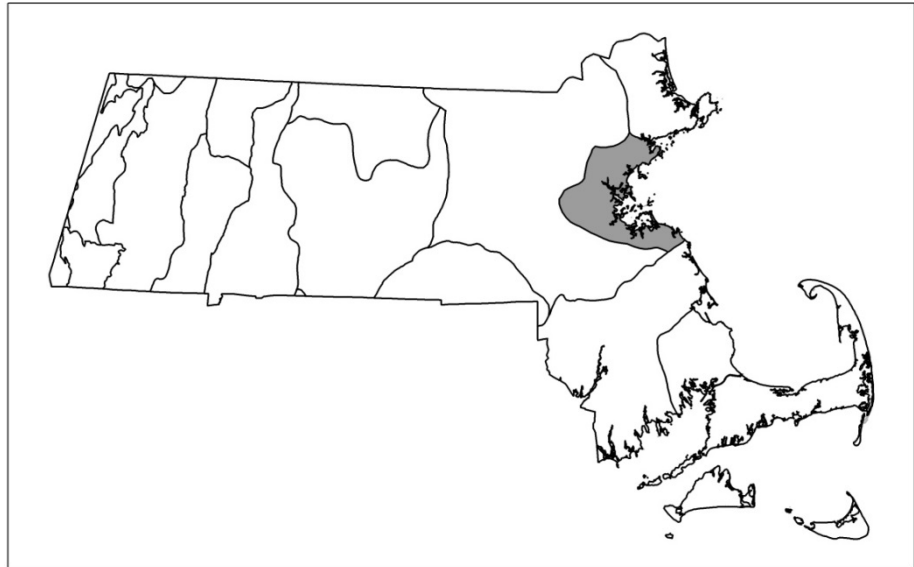




Maritime Rock Cliff Community

Community Code: CT2A4B0000

State Rank: S2



Concept: Sparsely vegetated rock areas with plants in cracks and ledges where soil collects, within the salt spray zone, but above normal high tides.

Environmental Setting: Maritime Rock Cliff Communities occur on the ocean side of rocky headlands and coastal bedrock outcrops, above the rocky intertidal, but within the salt spray zone where they are very exposed to storms. Vegetation grows in small pockets where the soil is augmented by droppings from gulls, cormorants, and other cliff-perching birds.

Vegetation Description: The Maritime Rock Cliff Community is sparsely vegetated by low, scattered, salt- and wind-hardy, often somewhat weedy plants, such as knotted pearlwort (*Sagina nodosa* ssp. *nodosa*), saltworts (*Salicornia* spp.), common rush (*Juncus effusus*), seaside plantain (*Plantago maritima*), poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*), blue toadflax (*Nuttallanthus canadensis*), seaside goldenrod (*Solidago sempervirens*), Scotch lovage (*Ligusticum scoticum*), common hairgrass (*Deschampsia flexuosa*), and native and non-native red fescues (*Festuca rubra*). Species from the top of the headland, often from a Maritime Shrubland community, occur in less exposed ledges. Plants of extremely exposed maritime rock cliffs and outcrops, such as on the outer Boston Harbor Islands, tend to be tough, non-native herbaceous perennials including mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*), black mustard (*Brassica nigra*), smartweed (*Persicaria lapathifolia*), and curly dock (*Rumex crispus*).

Differentiating Occurrences: Rock cliffs are arbitrarily defined as near vertical (>60% slope). Maritime Rock Cliff Communities derive from bedrock of a variety of different types, but are



consolidated material. Maritime Erosional Cliff Communities are made of mixed unconsolidated material. Both are steep shores in the salt spray zone above the intertidal shores. The vegetation of both communities is sparse and typically composed of weedy species from the surroundings. They are next to the ocean in the salt spray zone, above the twice-daily flooded area of the Marine Intertidal Rocky Shore Community. The Maritime Beach Strand Community is not on bedrock and is not close to vertical. Maritime Shrubland Communities occur outside of the daily salt spray zone and are generally flatter; they share species with Maritime Rock Cliff Communities, but are much more densely covered.

Associated Fauna:

Harbor seals (*Phoca vitulina*) use the rocks below the cliffs to haul out and rest. The exposed rock face itself does not provide habitat for specialized fauna.

Public Access:

Maritime Rock Cliffs are sensitive to visitation; care should be taken not to disturb plants during a visit. Slate Island, Boston Harbor Islands, Weymouth.

Threats:

Exotics; Oriental bittersweet and Scotch lovage being abundant with mullein, Morrow's honeysuckle, sow thistle, yarrow, and sheep fescue.

Management Needs:

USNVC/NatureServe:

Maritime Rock Cliffs (CEGL006619).