

# Maritime Rock Cliff Community

State Rank: S2 - Imperiled



Maritime Rock Cliff. Slate Island, Boston Harbor Islands National and State Park. Photo: National Park Service.

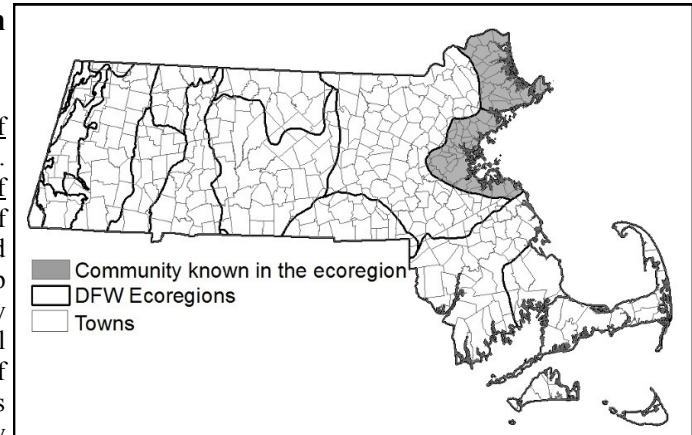
**Description:** Maritime Rock Cliff Communities occur on the ocean side of rocky headlands and coastal bedrock outcrops, above the rocky intertidal, but within the salt spray zone where they are very exposed to storms. Vegetation grows in small pockets where the soil is augmented by droppings from gulls,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

Sparsely vegetated Maritime Rock Cliff Communities are in cracks and ledges of seawards cliffs on rocky headlands above the tidal and salt spray zones. The low, scattered plants are salt and wind hardy.

**Characteristic Species:** The Maritime Rock Cliff Community is sparsely vegetated by low, scattered salt and wind hardy, often somewhat weedy plants, such as knotted pearlwort, saltworts, common rush, seaside plantain, poison ivy, blue toadflax, common hairgrass, seaside goldenrod, and native and non-native fescues. Species from the top of the bluff, often 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, mustards, smartweeds, and docks.

## Differentiating from Related Communities:

Maritime Rock Cliff Communities are bedrock. 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 the both communities is sparse and typically composed of weedy species from the surroundings. Marine Intertidal Rocky Shore Communities are lower on a rocky shore and are flooded twice daily by tides.



## Habitat for Associated Fauna:

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

## Examples with 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.



Maritime Rock Cliff, Boston Harbor Islands. Photo: National Park Service.



Knotted pearlwort, growing in the cracks of a Maritime Rock Cliff. Photo: B. Sorrie, NHESP.

