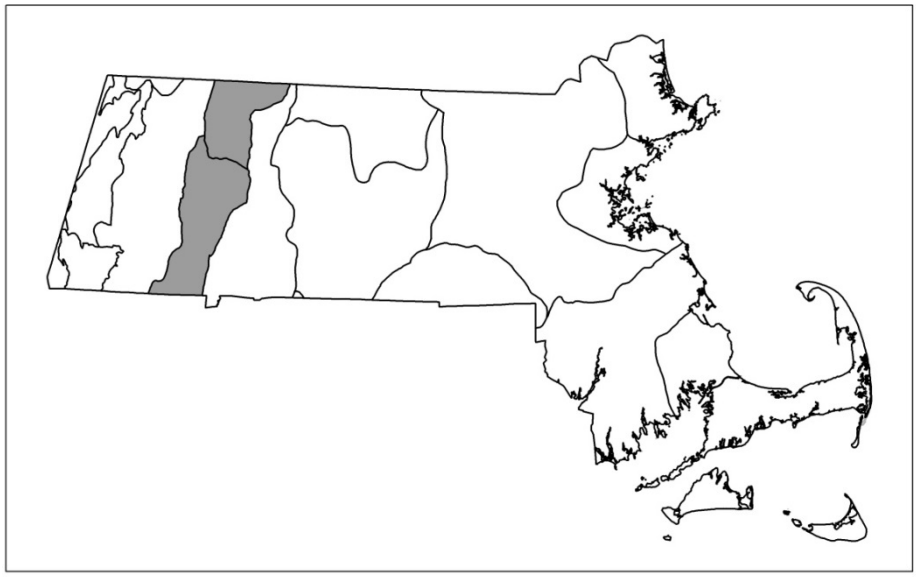
Riverside Rock Outcrop Community

Community Code: CT2A3A0000

State Rank: S3



Concept: Sparse, mostly herbaceous, vegetation limited to crevices where soil accumulates. Only outcrops influenced by river processes are considered to be riverside outcrops.

Environmental Setting: Only rock outcrops influenced by river processes are considered to be Riverside Rock Outcrop Communities, which nonetheless support terrestrial communities with non-wetland vegetation. The community occurs on flood- and ice-scoured bedrock stream banks and adjacent exposed ledges that are at or below the high water mark. The habitat is subject to flooding during much of the year. The outcrops may be low or steep on the river's edge or extending into the river channel. Mineral soil accumulates in crevices in the rocks. River spray and proximity to water may alleviate some of the harsh conditions usually encountered by plants growing in shallow soil in open areas.

Vegetation Description: Riverside Rock Outcrop Communities include low and scattered herbaceous plants; with few woody plants due to annual ice scouring. Generally there is a mix of only a few species per site: included might be harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*), big bluestem grass (*Andropogon gerardii*), hemp dogbane (*Apocynum cannabinum*), goldenrods (*Solidago* spp.), and various asters (*Symphyotrichum* spp.) including New York aster (*Symphyotrichum novi-belgii*). Very occasional woody shrubs might be smooth rose (*Rosa blanda*) or running serviceberry (*Amelanchier stolonifera*). Non-native species that commonly occur are Canada bluegrass (*Poa compressa*) and purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*).

Differentiating Occurrences: Riverside Rock Outcrop Communities are open terrestrial communities often associated with Riverside Seep Communities, High-energy Riverside Meadows,

and/or High-energy Riverbank Communities, all of which are wetter and support wetland vegetation. Riverside Rock Outcrop Communities are on bedrock and have the sparsest vegetation. High-energy Riverbank Communities occur on cobble and sand substrates and usually also have sparse, open, low vegetation, but with some bare cobble and sand. High-energy Rivershore Meadows and Riverside Seep Communities are wet and have fairly dense vegetation with some organic as well as mineral soil development. All occur along the shores of fast-flowing, high-energy rivers, and differences may not always be distinct.

Associated Fauna: These small, exposed communities have few, if any, animals that are restricted to them, but rather are parts of the habitat of wide-ranging riverine and upland animals, including shoreline foragers such as river otter (*Lontra canadensis*), mink (*Mustela vison*), and raccoons (*Procyon lotor*). Turtles are not attracted to rocks, preferring to bask on logs. Occasional bull frogs (*Rana catesbeiana*) or northern water snakes (*Nerodia sipedon*) would be expected. Common species of dragonflies and tiger beetles hunt over the rock areas.

Public Access: Visitation to Riverside Rock Outcrops is discouraged because of damage caused by trampling of plants.

Threats: Trampling by river users and competition from exotic species.

Management Needs: Removal of exotics from best sites.

USNVC/NatureServe: Related to: Great Lakes Alkaline Rocky Shore Sparse Vegetation [CEGL002506] and *Andropogon gerardii - Campanula rotundifolia - Solidago simplex* Herbaceous Vegetation [CEGL006284].