

# Sandplain Grassland – Inland Variant

State Rank: S2 - Imperiled



Sandplain Grassland - Inland Variant dominated by little bluestem, green below is non-native grass. Photo: Marianne Piche, DFW.

**Description:** Sandplain Grasslands - Inland Variants are open (essentially treeless), often semi-natural communities visually dominated by native grasses and herbaceous species with sparse shrubs and patches of bare soil and lichens. They occur inland outside the influence of coastal storms and salt spray, primarily on droughty, low nutrient soils, and usually need management to remain open in the absence of disturbance; otherwise inland grasslands generally succeed to forest. Surroundings often include Pitch Pine - Scrub Oak Communities. Many sites have been severely disturbed in the past which has slowed succession to woody species, but which has also allowed establishment of non-native species. The community occurs at small inland airports, along

Sandplain Grassland - Inland Variant is an often semi-natural open community visually dominated by native grasses on sandplains or gravel in interior parts of the state. It usually needs management to remain tree-less.

power line rights of way, and on military lands and wildlife management areas on sandplains – all areas that are managed to exclude tall woody plants.

**Characteristic Species:** Sandplain Grasslands - Inland Variant are dominated by graminoids, usually little bluestem, Pennsylvania sedge, and poverty grass. These communities generally include a mix of herbaceous species such as goldenrods, milkweeds including butterfly weed, and occasionally New England blazing star. There may be fewer shrubs than occur in coastal grasslands, although sweet fern can form large patches, particularly in inland areas, and dewberries may be abundant in either.



White pine is often the first tree to invade inland grasslands, with clonal species such as aspen and sumac.

New England Blazing Star.  
Photo: Jennifer Garrett, NHESP.

**Differentiating from Related Communities:** Sandplain Grasslands of all types are part of a structural and successional continuum with other communities. When communities are not distinct, the best fit should be named. Sandplain Grasslands - Inland Variant are located inland away from maritime influences and generally lack coastal species including sandplain flax, golden

heather, and sandplain blue-eyed grass that grow in coastal Sandplain Grasslands. The regular management needed to maintain inland grasslands usually results in fewer shrubs than are seen in coastal grasslands.

Sandplain Heathlands - Inland Variant look shrubbier with a taller shrub layer comprised of scrub oak, black huckleberry, and/or lowbush blueberry, any of which may be dominant.

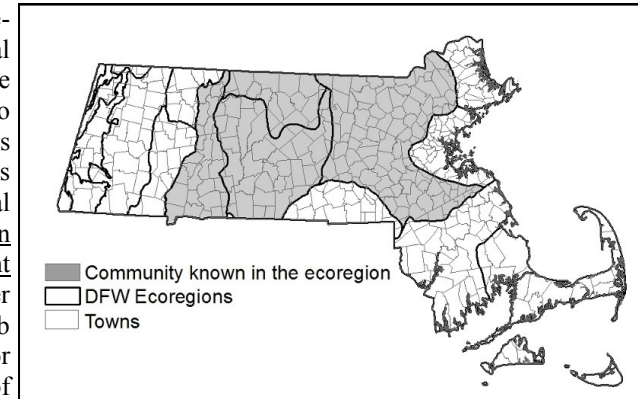
Cultural Grasslands are cultivated or the results of cultivation with non-native, cool season agricultural grasses (pastures and hayfields were the models).



Grassland greening up after recent fire, with adjacent aspen. Photo: Joanne Theriault, NHESP.

## Habitat for Associated Fauna:

Location in the state and size of the grassland strongly affect the species that inhabit a Sandplain Grassland – Inland Variant. Many grassland birds are typical of midwestern prairies and agricultural fields. Airports currently support Massachusetts' largest populations of Upland Sandpipers, Grasshopper



Sparrows, and Savannah Sparrow. Other grassland birds include Killdeer, Northern Meadowlarks, and Horned Larks. Meadow voles, meadow jumping mouse, and the northern short-tailed shrew would be expected in most grasslands. They would be hunted by garter snakes, Kestrels, and wintering Northern Harriers, Snowy Owls, and Short-eared Owls. The suite of grassland Lepidopteran fauna includes many rare species.

## Examples with Public Access:

Southwick WMA, Southwick; Montague WMA, Montague.



Sandplain Grassland - Inland Variant, airport showing different mowing regimes. Photo: Scott Melvin, NHESP.

