

Wet Meadow

State Rank: S4 - Secure



Wet Meadow in a river backwater, dominated by rice cut-grass. Photo: P. Swain, NHESP.

Description: Wet Meadows occur in lake basins, wet depressions, along slow moving streams, and in sloughs and other areas with impeded drainage along rivers. The mucky mineral soils are permanently saturated and flood occasionally but standing water is not present throughout the growing season as in Deep and Shallow Emergent Marshes. As Wet Meadows flood only temporarily, woody plants could become established: many sites are managed using other forms of repeated disturbance, including grazing or mowing, to prevent succession to shrub- or woodland.

Characteristic Species: Wet Meadows are often uniform appearing communities dominated by a single species from the sedge family or sometimes a rush or a grass. Tussock-forming sedges, such as tussock-sedge or lakeside sedge, often have over 50% cover, with variable proportions of other graminoids and herbaceous species. Canada bluejoint, wool-grass, woolly-fruited sedge, slender spike-sedge, stalked wool-grass, rice cut-grass, and brown beak-sedge are typical of wet meadows

Wet Meadows are graminoid wetland communities that occur in lake basins, wet depressions, along streams, and in sloughs and backwaters in river basins. The soil is saturated during the growing season but not generally inundated.

and may occasionally be dominant. Characteristic herbaceous associates include water smartweed, river-horsetail, nodding bur-marigold, spotted Joe-Pye-weed, and northern blue flag. Calcareous wet meadows have additional lime-loving species, including red-footed spike-sedge, delicate sedge, and fen-sedge. Wet meadows are called "sedge meadows" in many other states, but "wet meadow" is used in Massachusetts because of known occurrences of meadows dominated by rice cut-grass, Canada bluejoint, and other non-sedge species.

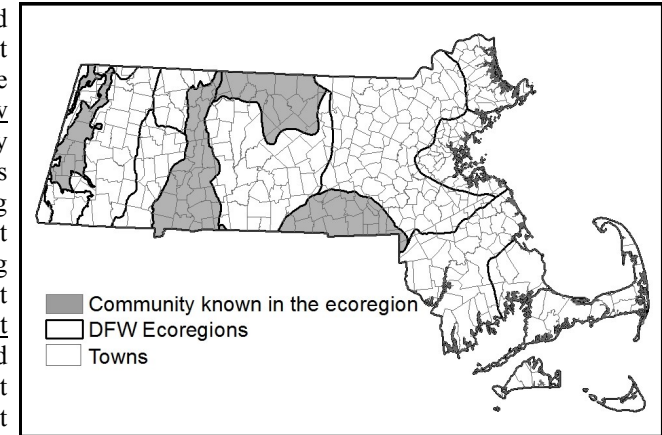


A Wet Meadow that is mowed to limit tree and shrub encroachment. Photo: Tom Lautzenheiser.

Differentiating from Related Communities: The physical and biological characteristics of wet meadow, emergent marsh, and shoreline communities overlap and intergrade. Wet

Meadows are graminoid wetland communities that can be considered to be subtypes of Shallow Emergent Marshes, typically with a single sedge or grass species dominating. Standing water is not present throughout the growing season as in emergent marshes. Kettlehole Wet Meadows are a specialized type of Shallow Emergent Marsh in small basins that have dense graminoid marshes on mucky peat. Shallow Emergent Marshes are graminoid wetlands in broad, flat areas bordering rivers or along lake margins, are seasonally flooded, and usually have surface water all year. Coastal Plain Pondshore Communities and Coastal Plain Pondshore Communities – Inland Variant are generally on sand around ponds in closed basins that intersect groundwater that set pond levels. By late summer an exposed shoreline supports herbaceous species that is not generally dominated by tall dense graminoids. Sediments are sandy or mucky, but not peaty. Acidic Pondshores/Lakeshore Communities are broadly defined, variable shorelines around open water not explicitly included in calcareous or coastal plain pondshores. The shore line is often not distinct, merging into marsh or other wetlands.

Habitat for Associated Fauna: Many animals, vertebrates and invertebrates, common and rare, use wet meadows and marshes for feeding,



nesting, roosting, cover, and movement corridors. The sedges, bulrushes and grasses of Wet Meadows provide a food resource for a variety of marsh birds. Inconspicuous ("secretive") water birds, such as rails and bitterns, nest in extensive wet meadows and marshes that lack human disturbance.

Examples with Public Access: Hop Brook WMA, Lee; Ashburnham SF, Ashburnham.



Large sedge dominated Wet Meadow. Photo: Tom Lautzenheiser.

