Rich Conifer Swamp

**State Rank:** S3 - Vulnerable

Rich Conifer Swamps are species- and nutrient-rich swamps dominated by hemlock, balsam fir, or red spruce mixed with hardwoods including black ash. They usually have pockets of moss rather than sphagnum lawns.

**Description:** The generally closed canopies of Rich Conifer Swamps are dominated by mixed conifers with a high proportion of deciduous trees. Mineral-enriched water flows or seeps into the community and supports a high diversity of species in all strata. The surface is hummocky with areas of moss on the hummocks where most woody plants grow. The hollows may have water, bare ground, or herbaceous plant cover. Although the surface of the substrate may be dry by late summer, many hollows remain wet and mucky.

**Characteristic Species:** The vegetation of Rich Conifer Swamps is variable. The canopy is dominated by conifers (eastern hemlock, balsam fir, or red spruce, alone or together) mixed with red maple, yellow birch, American elm, and black ash. Species indicative of mineral enriched conditions are typical in the understory. Dense patches in the shrub layer may include spicebush, witch hazel, or hornbeam with saplings of the canopy trees. The variable and diverse herbaceous layer may include jack-in-the-pulpit, foamflower, lesser mitrewort, wild oats, oak-fern, delicate sedge, swamp-saxifrage, northern horse-balm, golden ragwort, golden saxifrage, rough-leaved goldenrod, and purple avens.

Rich Conifer Swamps are part of the habitat of large mobile animals. Ground level browsers, including white tail deer, snow shoe hare, and New England cottontail, use shrubby areas in the community. Conifer swamps tend to have dense shade and are relatively cool in the summer, making them preferred areas for animals that get hot, such as moose. Areas of Rich Conifer Swamps where water stands through the spring can function as amphibian breeding habitat.

**Examples with Public Access:**
Appalachian Trail Corridor, Sheffield; Agawam Lake WMA, Great Barrington; Hinsdale Flats WMA, Hinsdale; Savoy WMA and Notchview Reservation (TTOR), Windsor; Hiram H. Fox WMA, Chester; Otis SF, Sandisfield; Orange WCE (MGLT), Orange.

**Habitat for Associated Fauna:**
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**From:** Classification of Natural Communities of Massachusetts [http://www.mass.gov/nhesp/](http://www.mass.gov/nhesp/)
Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program, Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, 1 Rabbit Hill Rd., Westborough, MA 01581

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(508) 389-6360