

# Maritime Beach Strand Community

State Rank: S3 – Vulnerable



Maritime Beach Strand above the wrack and into the dune grass. Photo: S. Melvin, NHESP.

**Description:** Maritime Beach Strand Communities are subject to overwash during storms and spring tides. They are dynamic and changeable systems with an extremely harsh physical environment. Currents and winds constantly shift the shape and pattern of the beach. Sun and rains beat down on an open and exposed surface. Salt spray and windborne sand dry and batter the resident flora and fauna. The beach itself is built up by longshore sediment transport from upcurrent beaches. At the top of the beach, the berm is an unstable sand ridge that is deposited above mean high water by storm wave action. The berm moderates change on the ocean beach by providing a reservoir of

Maritime Beach Strand Communities are sparsely vegetated in narrow, wrack-strewn areas seaward of dunes, but above daily high tides, often in barrier beach systems.

sand available to replenish either beach or dune. The ocean may completely reclaim berm sands in winter during storms. Sand beaches may grade into dunes.

**Characteristic Species:** Maritime Beach Strands are sparsely vegetated communities with scattered cover of dune grass with occasional sea-rocket, beach pea, seabeach orache, seabeach sandwort, seaside-

flatsedge, seabeach saltwort, and seaside goldenrod particularly at the foot of the dunes or protected beaches, along with the non-natives Russian thistle and seaside poppy. Beaches with regular foot or vehicular traffic have much less vegetation.



Oysterleaf on upper beach, just below a patch of denser exotic sea-poppy. Photo: Bruce A. Sorrie, NHESP.

**Differentiating from Related Communities:** Maritime Beach Strand Communities are above the high tides, between the wrack line and the dunes and

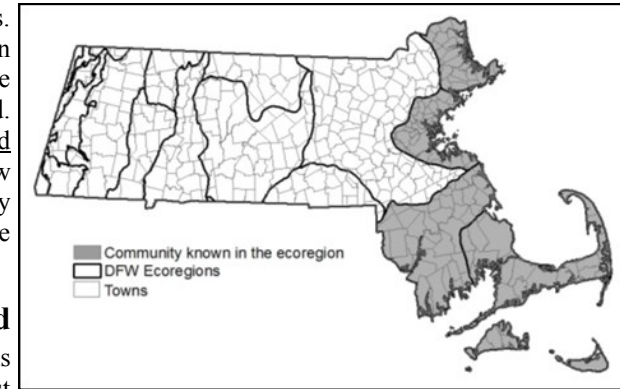
support scattered vascular plants. The exact point of transition from beach strand to foredune may not be clear on the ground. Marine Intertidal Gravel/ Sand Beach Communities are below the wrack and submerged by high tides. Vegetation in the intertidal beach is non-vascular.

**Habitat for Associated Fauna:** Some shorebirds including Piping Plover, Least Terns, and American Oystercatcher are beach specialists, nesting on beach strands

Piping Plover with chicks, nest on beach strand. Photo: Bill Byrne, MassWildlife.



and foraging on nearby intertidal and open water areas. Beach strands are important shorebird staging areas: migratory shorebirds use barrier beach systems, including the beach strand community, for resting and congregating before and during migration. Merlins and Peregrine Falcons forage on beaches during migrations. No amphibians or reptiles regularly occur on beaches. Mammal, including red and gray fox, striped skunk, raccoon, and coyote, feed on debris brought in with wrack and invertebrates under the wrack line. Generalist small



mammals feed on debris, seeds, and invertebrates in the wrack line. Seals haul out on beaches to rest. Invertebrate specialists include tiger beetles, beach flies, and, on the south side of the Cape, ghost crabs at their northern limit of distribution.

**Examples with Public Access:** Cape Cod National Seashore; Monomoy NWR, Orleans and Chatham; Horseneck Beach State Reservation, Westport; Parker River NWR, Newbury; Boston Harbor Islands, Boston area.



Shorebird habitat on beach strand. Photo: Scott Melvin, NHESP.

