

# Maritime Juniper Woodland/Shrubland

State Rank: S1 – Critically Imperiled



Maritime Juniper Woodland/Shrubland above a salt marsh. Photo: Patricia Swain, NHESP.

**Description:** Maritime Juniper Woodland/Shrublands occur on and between sand dunes, on the upper edges of salt marshes and on cliffs and rocky headlands: all areas receiving salt spray from high winds. The maritime juniper community is evergreen, dominated by variable amounts of short (less than 15 ft.), often scattered eastern red cedar (juniper) sculpted by winds and salt spray. Although this community is often protected behind foredunes, occasional severe storms may deposit windblown salt, sand, and tidal overwash that damage or kill existing plants, altering the community for some years - and maintaining the mosaic of community types in the barrier beach system. The steepness of dune or bluff slopes and exposure to wind and salt spray maintain this as an open community. On flatter adjacent uplands, this community grades into denser forest, other maritime communities, and successional old fields.

**Characteristic Species:** Maritime Juniper Woodland/Shrubland varies from dense shrubland to open woodland. Trees are usually short relative to interior

The Maritime Juniper Woodland/Shrubland is a predominantly evergreen community within the coastal salt spray zone. The trees tend to be short (less than 15 feet) and scattered, with the tops sculpted by winds and salt spray.

forests, in areas of continuous changes of levels of salt spray and substrate types. The dominant species is eastern red cedar (also called juniper), though the abundance of red cedar is highly variable. It grows in association with scattered trees and shrubs typical of the surrounding vegetation such as pitch pine, various oaks, black cherry, red maple, blueberries, huckleberries, sumac, and very often, poison ivy. Green briar can be abundant in more established woodlands, particularly along open edges. The herbaceous layer is highly variable, with little blue stem grass, beach grass, and sedges, often with scattered beach heather. Open areas have lichen patches. Microtopography and local conditions strongly influence the species assemblage.



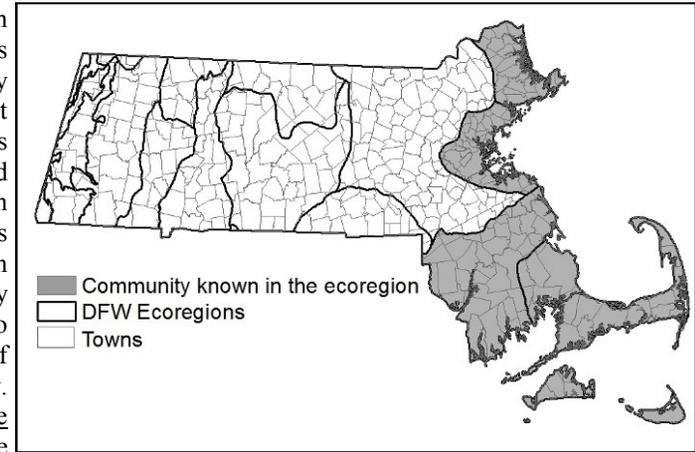
Maritime Juniper Woodland/Shrubland at the top of a foredune. Photo: P. Swain, NHESP.

**Differentiating from Related Communities:** The Maritime Juniper Woodland/Shrubland community may be sparse shrubland or woodland, mixed with other communities, in areas of constant changes in levels of salt spray and

substrate stability; even in stable situations community edges may not be clear. Different types of communities grade into and interdigitate with each other. Very small patches of any type within another community should be considered to be part of the variation of the main community. Maritime Pitch Pine Woodlands on Dunes are

dominated by pitch pine. Maritime Shrubland communities are dominated by a dense mixture of primarily deciduous shrubs, but may include red cedar. Bare sand dominates Maritime Dune Communities that are only sparsely vegetated with very scattered patches of low shrubs, including red cedar, pitch pines, herbaceous species, and grasses. The most similar vegetation to Maritime Juniper Woodland/Shrubland is old field red cedar (not separated out as a community type in this classification). Old field red cedar dominated woodlands grow in abandoned pastures and along major highways and are not maintained by salt spray. They are often more diverse than the maritime community and would be expected to become more forested over time. They may be quite difficult to separate from adjoining Maritime Juniper Woodland/Shrublands.

**Habitat for Associated Fauna:** There are no animal species known to be restricted to maritime woodlands or shrublands. However, these communities



provide habitat for shrubland nesting birds and are important as feeding and resting/roosting areas for migrating birds. Generally, in more salt influenced environments, fewer animals will be expected.

**Examples with Public Access:** Sandy Neck, Barnstable; Cape Cod National Seashore, Wellfleet. Boston Harbor Islands, Hingham.



Inside an older Juniper Woodland, top of a bluff next to the ocean. Photo: P. Swain, NHESP.

