

Maritime Shrubland

State Rank: S3 - Vulnerable



Dense sumac in a Maritime Shrubland. Photo: Patricia Swain, NHESP.

Description: Maritime Shrubland communities occur along the coast within the area of direct influence of the ocean and salt spray, such as on barrier beach dunes, next to tidal marshes, or on bluffs or rocky headlands. Maritime Shrublands often occur on sand or bedrock that does not hold water. They may extend inland in areas with droughty soils or extreme exposure to ocean winds that inhibit tree growth. Offshore islands can have extensive areas of Maritime Shrublands. They are dominated by patches of dense shrubs with scattered areas of more open low growth or bare ground, and have less than about 25% tree canopy. Plants in these communities are exposed to the direct influences of salt and constant ocean wind, which select for stress-tolerant species. The species of maritime shrublands do not withstand flooding by salt water, but they tolerate or recover

Maritime Shrubland communities are dominated by patches of dense shrubs with scattered areas of more open low growth or bare ground. On rocky coastal headlands or behind dunes, they receive salt spray during storms.

from salt deposits on their leaves. Fire was an important part of this environment prior to the establishment of fire suppression regimes in settled areas. Without regular disturbance, the community may succeed to forest.



Bayberry in fruit, in a Maritime Shrubland. Photo: NHESP.

Characteristic Species: Maritime Shrublands are up to 2-3m (~6-10 ft.) tall and very dense, often with one or several species dominant. They usually have a sparse herbaceous layer, but grasses or sedges can be abundant. Vines, including catbrier and poison ivy, often cover other plants, grow in dense patches on their own, or form impenetrable barriers particularly on their edges. Black huckleberry, bayberry, black cherry, black chokeberry, sumac, blueberries, and juniper are some of the shrubs that occur either mixed or with any one dominant in small or large patches. Large areas with dense red cedar are split out as Maritime Juniper Woodland/Shrubland. Low bush blueberry and bearberry may be abundant. Non-native species including Oriental bittersweet and Morrow's honeysuckle are often abundant.

Differentiating from Related Communities: Maritime Shrublands are intended to be large, relatively continuous areas dominated by shrubs

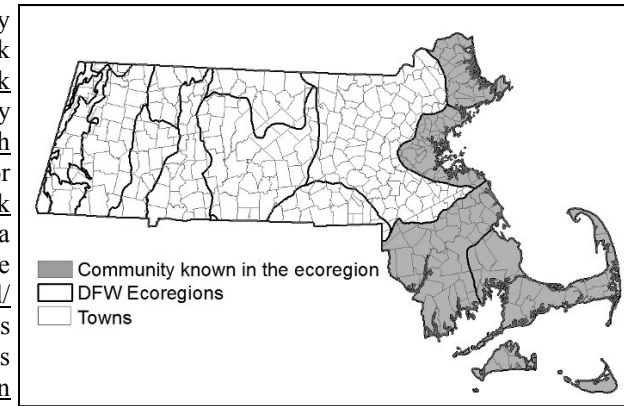
(>40% cover) in the salt spray zone. Large patches of scrub oak are separated out as Scrub Oak Shrublands. Areas dominated by pitch pine are Maritime Pitch Pine Woodland on Dunes, or Pitch Pine - Scrub Oak Community. Red cedar (Virginia juniper) dominated areas are Maritime Juniper Woodland/Shrublands. When shrub cover is <40%, the community is something else, often Sandplain Heathland or Maritime Dune.

Maritime Dunes include patches of shrubs in areas protected from winds and salt spray. When large and continuous such patches may be Maritime Shrublands. Tree cover should be <25% overall in a Maritime Shrubland. Maritime and coastal forests and shrublands grade into each other and other community types, such as wetlands in interdunal swales, dry shrubby dunes, and more inland oak forests.

Habitat for Associated Fauna: Shrub thickets provide nesting areas for Northern Harriers, Northern Towhee, and



Beach plum flowering in Maritime Shrubland. Photo: Patricia Swain, NHESP.



Song Sparrows. Maritime Shrublands are important during fall migrations for cover and forage -- many of the plants have fruit attractive to migrants. White-tailed deer maintain large populations in shrubland habitats. Coastal plain shrublands are habitat to state rare moths whose larvae feed on the typical shrubs. Generally, fewer terrestrial animals are expected as the environment becomes saltier.

Examples with Public Access: Halibut Point SP, Rockport; Boston Harbor Islands, Weymouth; Demarest - Lloyd Memorial SP, Dartmouth; Quivert Creek/Paines Creek (town), Brewster.



Maritime Shrubland, with salt damage from a storm. Photo: Patricia Swain, NHESP.

