

# Shrub Swamp

State Rank: S5 - Secure



Shrub Swamp along shoreline. Photo: Patricia Serrentino, Consulting Wildlife Ecologist.

**Description:** Wetland shrubs dominate Shrub Swamps. Shrub height may be from <1m to 5 meters, of uniform height or mixed. Shrub density can be variable, from dense (>75% cover) to fairly open (25-75% cover) with graminoid, herbaceous, or open water areas between shrubs. These common, widespread communities can be found where the water table is at or above the soil surface for most of the year - in lowlands, along the margins of rivers, streams and other waterbodies, and along or within forested or herbaceous dominated wetlands. Soils may be mineral or well decomposed organic material.

**Characteristic Species:** The species composition of Shrub Swamps is highly variable within and among sites. Dominant and codominant shrubs include alders, meadowsweet, buttonbush, swamp azalea, silky dogwood, winterberry, arrowwood, and poison sumac. Low growing, weak stemmed shrubs include dewberry, water-willow, and Canadian burnet. In general, shrub communities have <25% canopy cover of scattered and

Shrub Swamp Communities are a common and variable type of wetlands occurring on seasonally or temporarily flooded soils. They are often found in the transition zone between emergent marshes and swamp forests.

stunted trees. The herbaceous layer of shrub swamps is often sparse and species-poor. A mixture of species might typically include cinnamon, sensitive, royal, or marsh fern, common arrowhead, skunk cabbage, sedges, bluejoint grass, bur-reed, swamp candles, clearweed, and turtlehead. Invasive species include reed canary grass, glossy alder-buckthorn, common buckthorn, and purple loosestrife.

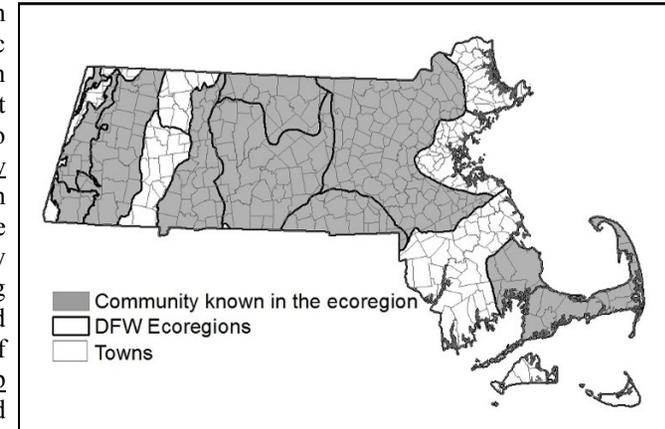


Sweet Pepperbush, common in eastern Shrub Swamps. Photo: Keith Love.

**Differentiating from Related Communities:** The physical and biological characteristics of Shrub Swamp, Acidic Shrub Fen, Highbush Blueberry Thickets, Fresh/Brackish Tidal Shrubland, emergent marshes, and shoreline communities overlap and intergrade. They all lack tree cover (<25% canopy cover) and they are all on wet substrates. Shrub Swamps have >25%

cover of tall shrubs with well decomposed organic soils. If highbush blueberries are dominant the community is likely to be a Highbush Blueberry Thicket, often occurring on peat. Acidic Shrub Fens are peatlands, dominated by low growing shrubs, along with sphagnum moss and herbaceous species of varying abundance. Deep Emergent Marshes and Shallow Emergent Marshes are graminoid dominated wetlands with <25% cover of tall shrubs. Acidic Pondshore/Lakeshore Communities are broadly defined, variable shorelines around open water. Shorelines often merge into swamps or marshes. Fresh/Brackish Tidal Shrubland are dense to open shrublands along tidal sections of coastal rivers. Forested swamp communities such as Red Maple Swamp and its variants often contain a significant shrub component, and may include patches of shrub swamp where the tree canopy cover is <25%.

**Habitat for Associated Fauna:** Many Shrub Swamps provide high-quality vernal-pool habitats. Relatively long hydroperiods ensure that amphibian larvae have plenty of time to develop, and the diverse vegetation structure provides both cover for larvae and egg-attachment substrates for breeding adults. Many species of migratory birds use the dense shrub thickets as protected nesting habitat. In the winter when the surface is frozen, browsers, including New England



Cottontail, have easy access to the shrubs and protection in the dense thickets. The larvae of many rare and common moth species feed on a variety of shrubs and associated herbaceous plants in shrub swamps throughout Massachusetts.

**Examples with Public Access:** Greener Reservation (ECGA), Boxford; Westminster Conservation land Tophet Swamp, Westminster; Jacobs Hill Reservation (TTOR), Royalston; Wekepeke WCE (Clinton Water Dept.), Sterling; 19th Hill WCE (MGCT), Winchendon.



Shrub Swamp with mixed graminoids. Photo: Patricia Serrentino, Consulting Wildlife Ecologist.

