



Natural Heritage &
Endangered Species
Program

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program
Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife
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Instructions for Natural Community Form 2

A. Identifiers

Community Name: put in what you think the community type is. This may be changed by NHESP based on your description and our interpretation of it.

NatureServe Association or System: Definitely optional.

Survey Date: Date(s) that you went to the site. Multiple days are possible: May 2-23, 2013; Summer 2013; or even "many dates 2005 through 2012" – but include a 'most recent date'.

Today's Date: the date you finish filling out the field form.

Survey Site Name: can be left blank, or a big site such as "Myles Standish State Forest" or a more localized such as "MSSF around College Pond," or something that works for you. It's meant to help find the area.

Surveyor Name(s): list everyone who helped describe the natural community occurrence.

Best Source: the name of the person who is responsible for the form, including contact information.

Transcriber: IGNORE this field

Town Name: Put in the name of the town(s) where the natural community site occurs.

Directions to site: This is important. Not just a GPS point. Put in where to park, how to access the area, whether there are trails or to follow a compass line.

GPS Point(s) circle Yes or No (or write a Y or N). Put in the best latitude and longitude. [Note: if you have multiple lat/longs, make a table and put it on the map page. Include Waypoint ID, latitude, longitude, and date/time they were taken. These should be identified on the associated map].

B. Community Description

Vegetation Description: This is a description of the vegetation that is seen at the site, usually at the middle or best area, but with reference to variation noted and changes at the edges. Species seen and their relative abundances should be described. At least 3 tree species (when there are any) should be listed with their coverage relative to the whole area. Say there aren't any if there aren't, or note if they are clustered or scattered. Note if there are multiple heights of trees, and the size of the diameters (general categories are fine, such as, about 8 inches, or most are about 4 inches in diameter). The shrub layer should also have at least the dominant species and their cover noted. Note clustering, openings, and other structural variations. The herbaceous layer should have the most common, and perhaps any uncommon species noted. The percent cover of the whole layer should be noted, and then individual species with the relative abundance of each species. Most herbaceous layers have many species, most with very low cover. They don't all have to be listed, although it adds information to include as many as possible. Species groups can be given: grasses or sedges, for example. Note that height defines the layer, so tree seedlings can be in the herbaceous or even shrub layer.

Estimated Size: Include your best guess as to acreage, if you want to. Not required.

GIS Acres: NHESP will take this from the map when data are considered for the NHESP database.

Physical Description: As on the form, include a description of the landscape surrounding the community occurrence. Describe slope direction, steepness, rock outcrops, downed wood, standing snags, closeness to a stream/pond/wetland/forest, and other features of the community occurrence. Include if there are stumps from cutting, wolf (open grown) trees in a forest, wood roads, stonewalls, and other signs of past land use. Most of these latter observations should also be in the Evidence of Disturbance section on page 2.

Is community on conservation land? (if known). Yes or No

Managed Area Name: give the property name, or type. State (which agency), Municipal conservation land, local land trust – provide the name of the property if you know it, but at least the type is useful.

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Evidence of Disturbance/Threats to the Community/Management Recommendations: As noted on the form, describe disturbances that you see. Some may have been put into the physical description, repeat here if there is more detail. Note proximity to roads, houses, campgrounds, current uses that may affect the natural community. Include observations and suggestions on management. Note effects (such as erosion, wetland disturbances, tree removal...) from activities in the next field.

Recreational Use: May not be very different from the previous field which is intended to include the results of activities listed here.

Protection Comments: Optional. Applies to land not already in conservation ownership. Mostly it refers to how big a property might be and whether conservation ownership would be practical (for example small occurrences in development might not make sense for acquisition by a statewide conservation group).

General Comments: Optional. As noted on the form, comments can include the type of sampling. Comments can also include whether the area sampled was part of a larger community occurrence. Or other relevant notes.

Owner's Name and telephone and address: Include if known.

Owner Comments: Optional. Include notes that might help a subsequent surveyor, if relevant.

- C. Community Element Occurrence Ranking -- DO THIS. NHESP will re-evaluate the ranks you provide but your input is useful.

The ranking is very important. While someone filling out a form may not have statewide experience for comparison, (please say so if that is the case) they have generally looked at communities throughout their area. Keep in mind that NHESP may revise the ranks submitted, but your input will guide that. Please use the comment fields!

There are 3 categories to consider when ranking natural communities.

Size: relative to other occurrences of the type of natural community, includes fragmentation, natural patchiness, and configuration (are the edges impacted by surrounding activities?).

Condition: Are the expected native species present in about the expected abundances? Are natural processes able to function (if a floodplain, is there flooding?, if a pitch pine/scrub oak community, can fire occur?, if a forest interior, is there surrounding forest buffer?)? Are there invasive exotic species? If so, at what abundance? (few, occasional, abundant, large patches, ...).

Landscape Context: Evaluate the landscape noting nearby development including roads, fragmentation of the community, and uses of surrounding land including buffer from development.

Then summarize: Community EO Rank (EO = Element Occurrence, NHESP jargon for the Community occurrence (or could be a species occurrence if it were a rare species form): Summarize the Size, Condition, and Landscape ranks while considering the long term prospects for the long term continuation of the occurrence at the current quality.

Other rare species and/or natural communities observed at this site: Optional, fill in only if you actually see and report on an additional uncommon natural community, or a rare species.

Page3: Maps, required. Attach or insert map(s) of the area, WITH A BOUNDARY shown for the community occurrence. Show GPS points and tracks. At least one map must be at 1:12,000 scale and show road names, pond names, and/or other identifiable features. Preferred format would be a topo map and an aerial. GoogleEarth maps with road names are acceptable. ALSO provide the GPS points and community boundary electronically.

Page 4: Photos, required. Attach or insert photos (a few) of the Community Occurrence. Label the photos with photographer's name, date taken, and where taken. Include information on why each photo is included. (For example: Photo of Pitch Pine/Scrub Oak Community occurrence at Wings Hole, from the western edge towards the center, showing the variation in shrub layer. Or: Photo of Atlantic White Cedar Swamp from the center towards the upland, showing hummocks and hollows.)