Red Maple - Black Ash Swamp

**Description:** Red Maple - Black Ash Swamps are deciduous wetland forests characterized by a high diversity of tree species, dominated by red maple and black ash, and a relatively diverse herbaceous layer with many tall shrubs in the understory. They typically occur in areas with circumneutral groundwater seepage and are relatively wet with seasonal inundation in depressions at or near the headwaters of streams, especially in the northern part of the state. Occasionally they occur on sloping edges of river floodplains adjacent to upland slopes where seepage input occurs or as small seepy pockets within larger red maple swamp matrices. The surface topography is hummock and hollow with fluctuating surface water levels between the hummocks.

**Characteristic Species:** Red maple and black ash are prominent in the canopy and subcanopy. Black ash trees do not usually grow very large in these wet environments and can be most abundant in the subcanopy. Common associates in the canopy include yellow birch, white pine, and hemlock. The subcanopy often includes American elm with young of the canopy trees. The most characteristic shrub in the variable shrub layer is winterberry usually with highbush blueberry, poison-sumac, speckled alder, spicebush and others in lower abundance. Cinnamon fern and skunk cabbage are usually the most abundant species in the lush and diverse herbaceous layer that includes a high coverage of royal, marsh, and sensitive ferns. Herbaceous associates include the seep indicators swamp saxifrage, golden ragwort, foamflower, and golden saxifrage, as well as widespread forest wetland species such as jewelweed, jack-in-the-pulpit, water avens, goldthread, and tussock sedge. Mosses (predominantly sphagnum) can cover the hummocks although there is little build up of peat.

**Differentiating from Related Communities:**

Red Maple - Black Ash Swamps are a species rich variant of Red Maple Swamps with black ash abundant in the canopy. Soils are enriched by circumneutral groundwater seepage.

Red Maple - Black Ash Swamps add variation to the habitats of large, mobile animals. Fishless hollows that retain standing water through the spring function as vernal pools and provide important amphibian breeding habitat.

**Examples with Public Access:**

- Oxbow NWR, Harvard; Tully Lake project (USACE), Royalston; Satan’s Kingdom WMA, Northfield; Mt. Holyoke Range SP, South Hadley.