



Rocky Summit Heath

State Rank S4

Community Description

Dwarf shrubs and stunted spruce or fir are the dominant features of this patchy vegetation. The tree layer is sparse (<25% cover) and includes balsam fir, red or black spruce, and (especially near the coast) northern white cedar. Dwarf shrub dominants vary and include Labrador tea, blueberries, and mountain cranberries. Interspersed islands of taller shrubs and stunted, wind flagged trees (<2 m tall) may grade to krummholz form. Herbs are patchy and less extensive than shrubs; three-toothed cinquefoil is usually present and often prominent. The bryoid layer is usually sparse (<30% cover), but may be more extensive in moist bedrock depressions. In these low spots, peat mosses are typical; otherwise, lichens are the dominant bryoids.

Soil and Site Characteristics

Sites occupy upper slopes and ridges near the coast or mid-elevation balds (2,000'-3,000' inland). Soils are patchy, in bedrock pockets, consist of a thin layer (5-25 cm deep) of organic duff mixed with sand or rock fragments, and are acidic (pH 4.8-5.0) and excessively well drained, except in localized peaty pockets.

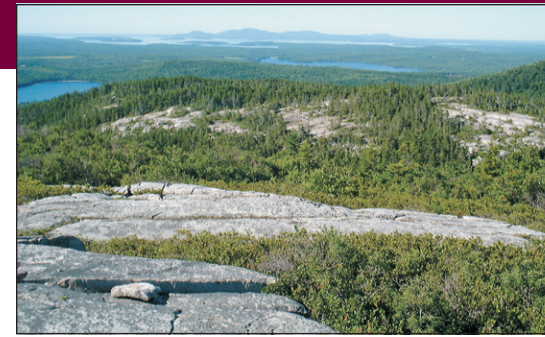
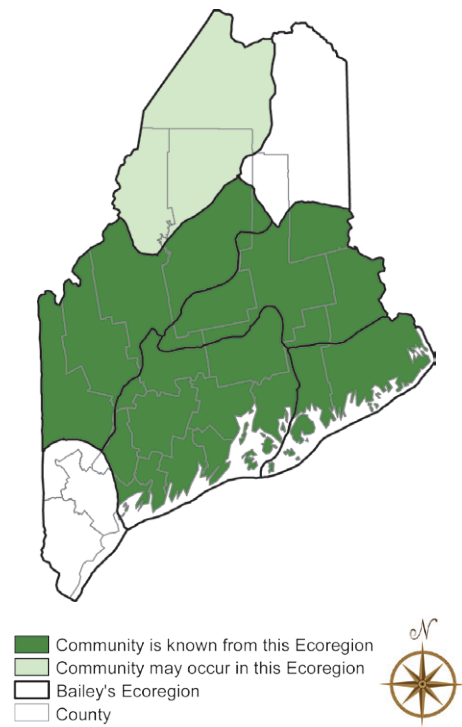
Diagnostics

Tree cover is sparse, stunted, and patchy (<25% cover); balsam fir and heart-leaved paper birch are typical; red oak may occur at some coastal locations. Shrub cover is typically 10-50% at lower elevation sites or in pockets at higher elevations. Dwarf shrub cover exceeds herb cover, with lowbush blueberry or mountain cranberry prominent.

Similar Types

Crowberry - Bilberry Summit Balds occur at higher elevations but lack tree cover and feature crowberry, bilberry, and/or highland rush. Three-toothed Cinquefoil - Blueberry Low Summit Balds occur at similar elevations and may co-occur with Rocky Summit Heaths, but the former usually have herbaceous species exceeding dwarf shrub species in the herb layer. Other open summit communities occur at higher elevations and feature at least some strictly alpine species such as Bigelow's sedge, highland rush, diapensia, Lapland rosebay, etc. Red Spruce - Mixed Conifer Woodlands are floristically similar and may co-occur but have >25% tree cover.

Location Map



Rocky Summit Heath

Conservation, Wildlife, and Management Considerations

Because this community type is usually associated with nice views, many sites have moderate to heavy hiker use. Off trail traffic can seriously degrade the vegetation, but at most sites the relatively dense shrub and conifer vegetation does not invite off trail wanderings. This type is well represented on public lands and private conservation lands.

Coniferous forest specialists like blackpoll warblers and spruce grouse are common associates in this community.

Distribution

Western and coastal Maine (New England - Adirondack and Laurentian Mixed Forest Provinces), extending west into northern New England and New York and east into the Canadian Maritimes.

Landscape Pattern: Small Patch

Examples on Conservation Lands You Can Visit

- Bald Mountain, Little Concord Pond Public Lands - Oxford Co.
- Black Mountain, Donnell Pond Public Lands - Hancock Co.
- Blueberry Mountain, White Mountain National Forest - Oxford Co.
- Cadillac Mountain, Acadia National Park - Hancock Co.

Characteristic Plants

These plants are frequently found in this community type. Those with an asterisk are often diagnostic of this community.

Canopy

Balsam fir*

Sapling/shrub

- Balsam fir*
- Gray birch*
- Mountain holly*
- Northern white cedar*
- Red spruce*
- Shadbush*
- Wild-raisin*
- Winterberry holly*

Dwarf Shrub

- Black huckleberry*
- Labrador tea*
- Lowbush blueberry*
- Mountain cranberry*
- Rhodora*
- Sheep laurel*

Herb

- Balsam fir*
- Three-toothed cinquefoil

Bryoid

- Reindeer lichen
- Sphagnum mosses*

Associated Rare Plants

- Alpine blueberry
- Alpine sweet-grass
- Smooth sandwort

Associated Rare Animals

- Bicknell's thrush

- Cold Brook Trail, White Mountain National Forest - Oxford Co.
- Sargent Mountain, Acadia National Park - Hancock Co.
- Tunk Mountain, Donnell Pond Public Lands - Hancock Co.