

Heath Alpine Ridge

State Rank S2

Community Description

This is the one of the most common community types above treeline. Vegetation can be quite variable and is dominated by a mixture of dwarf evergreen shrubs and herbs. Total vegetation cover is usually 35-65%. Shrubs usually make up 40-75% of the vegetation cover. The most abundant herbs are Bigelow's sedge and highland rush. Several rare species that occur only above treeline are found in this type. In one variant of this type, Bigelow's sedge is dominant and forms carpets, with heath shrubs and other herbaceous species far more sparse.

Soil and Site Characteristics

Sites occupy exposed, windswept ridges above treeline. Moisture conditions range from fairly xeric in exposed areas to moist patches in protected spots. Substrate varies from gravelly flats to stone pavements to rugged fellfields.

Diagnostics

Sites are above treeline and dominated by mixed dwarf shrubs, Bigelow's sedge, and highland rush. Alpine bilberry is prominent. Other strictly alpine species,



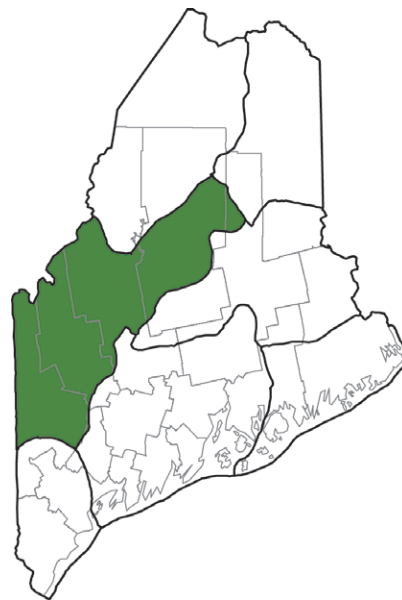
Bigelow's Sedge

such as boreal bentgrass, alpine sweetgrass, Lapland rosebay, bearberry willow, or alpine bearberry, are frequent but often at low cover.

Similar Types

Diapensia Alpine Ridge vegetation has higher cover of diapensia and usually lower cover of graminoids. Subalpine Heath - Krummholz and Crowberry - Bilberry Summit Bald vegetation lack the strictly alpine species (although alpine bilberry and highland rush may occur in both). Bilberry - Mountain-heath Alpine Snowbank vegetation features tundra dwarf birch, moss-plant, or mountain-heath. Cotton-grass - Heath Alpine Bogs also lack the strictly

Location Map



- Community is known from this Ecoregion
- Community may occur in this Ecoregion
- Bailey's Ecoregion
- County



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alpine shrubs and have peat mosses and other wetland plants.

Conservation, Wildlife, and Management Considerations

Most Maine occurrences of this type occur on public or private conservation land; however, hiker traffic has caused degradation in heavily used areas. As with all above treeline vegetation in Maine, careful trail siting and efforts to minimize off-trail use are the important management considerations.

On the tablelands of Mt. Katahdin, this community type provides the only known habitat in the world for the Katahdin arctic butterfly. Mt. Katahdin is also the only known nesting area in the state for the American pipit.

Distribution

Upper-elevation ridges of Maine's western and central mountains (mostly in the New England - Adirondack Province), extending westward and southward along the Appalachians. Likely extends northeastward to the Gaspé Peninsula.

Landscape Pattern: Small Patch

Characteristic Plants

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

Dwarf Shrub

Alpine bilberry*
Diapensia*
Mountain cranberry

Herb

Bigelow's sedge*
Highland rush*
Three-toothed cinquefoil

Associated Rare Plants

Alpine blueberry
Alpine sweet-grass
Bigelow's sedge
Boott's rattlesnakeroot
Boreal bentgrass
Cutler's goldenrod
Dwarf rattlesnake root
Mountain sandwort

Associated Rare Animals

American pipit
Katahdin arctic

Examples on Conservation Lands You Can Visit

- Bigelow Preserve Public Lands – Somerset Co.
- Goose Eye Mountain, Mahoosuc Public Lands – Oxford Co.
- Mt. Katahdin, Baxter State Park – Piscataquis Co.
- The Brothers, Baxter State Park – Piscataquis Co.