

Salt-hay Saltmarsh

State Rank S3

Community Description

These tidal marshes consist of expanses of saltmeadow cordgrass, smooth cordgrass, and/or black-grass. Shrubs are virtually absent, and the herbaceous cover is usually >85%. Much of the marsh is high marsh, where saltmeadow cordgrass forms meadows, and where black-grass may be dominant at slightly higher elevations. In the low marsh, along creeks or at elevations just below mean high water, smooth cordgrass is abundant. Salt pannes with abundant seashore saltgrass may dot the high marsh; goosetongue may also be locally common. Sea lavender and seaside goldenrod are often found at the upper tidal fringe. The dominant species typically form bands corresponding to tidal inundation zones.

Soil and Site Characteristics

Spartina saltmarshes are typically associated with beach-dune systems (back barrier marshes) or the outer reaches of estuaries (finger marshes). They are extensive along both sides of the tidal river or stream. The extensive high marsh zone is only flooded by above average tides. Salt marsh peat is typically several meters thick. Most are large (>10 acres), but they occasionally occur as smaller pockets along estuaries and coves.



Saltmarsh False-foxglove

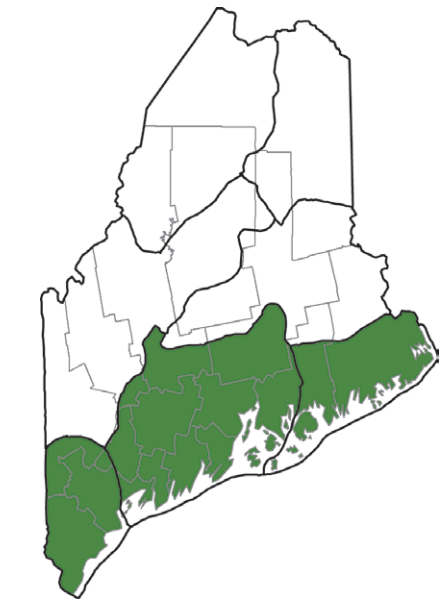
Diagnostics

These types are coastal back dune marshes, or near the outer reaches of estuaries, with saltmeadow cordgrass, smooth cordgrass, and black-grass totaling >35% cover, often in bands. The high marsh is well developed.

Similar Types

Mixed Graminoid-Forb Saltmarshes may also have cordgrasses and/or black-grass abundant, but will also have a mix of other co-dominant species, which tend to occur in patches rather than tidal zones; they are typically smaller, often less than 5 acres, and tend to occur farther upstream in estuaries or in smaller, more protected pockets. Brackish Tidal Marshes, which also occur farther upstream in estuaries, lack saltmarsh cordgrasses.

Location Map



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



Spartina Saltmarsh – Kinney Shores

Conservation, Wildlife, and Management Considerations

Few of the larger saltmarshes in Maine are pristine, with some having been filled and nearly all ditched at one time or another. With wetland protection in recent decades many of those that remain are reverting to a more natural hydrologic regime. Many of the remaining high quality *Spartina* Saltmarshes are on public land or private conservation land. Maintenance of appropriate wetland buffers can help reduce degradation that could result from adjacent land uses.

Saltmarshes are important nesting habitat for Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrow, seaside sparrow, and the rare saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow. These wetlands also provide foraging habitat for a large number of wadingbirds and shorebirds, including rare species such as the laughing gull, black-crowned night-heron, and least tern. The big bluet, a rare damselfly, inhabits saltmarsh ponds with emergent vegetation in southern Maine.

Distribution

Coastal Maine, mostly southwest of Merrymeeting Bay (Eastern Broadleaf Forest Province); sporadic and less well developed downeast. Extends southward along the Atlantic coast.

Landscape Pattern: Large Patch

Characteristic Plants

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

Herb

- Alkali bulrush
- Black-grass*
- Common arrow-grass*
- Goosetongue*
- Purple-stemmed aster
- Saltmeadow cordgrass*
- Sea milkwort*
- Seashore saltgrass*
- Seaside goldenrod*
- Smooth cordgrass*
- Wire rush*

Associated Rare Plants

- Dwarf glasswort
- Lilaeopsis
- Saltmarsh bulrush
- Saltmarsh false-foxglove
- Slender blue flag

Associated Rare Animals

- Big bluet
- Black-crowned night-heron
- Laughing gull
- Least tern
- Saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow
- Short-eared owl

Examples on Conservation Lands You Can Visit

- Bass Harbor Marsh, Acadia National Park – Hancock Co.
- Morse Mountain Preserve – Sagadahoc Co.
- Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge – York Co.
- Reid State Park – Sagadahoc Co.
- Scarborough Marsh Wildlife Management Area – Cumberland Co.