

Unity Wetlands

Unity, Unity Twp, Benton, Albion, Clinton, Burnham

Description

This large expanse of wetlands and uplands is centered on Unity Twp., extending east to Unity Pond and west to the Sebasticook River. (In practical terms, conservation here would likely be addressed as more than one focus area.) It includes a great array of natural features, especially of wetland and riparian habitats, but is also important as a unfragmented block of land—the upland as well as the wetland portions.

The Sebasticook River from its mouth upstream several miles is the best habitat in the state for at least two rare mussels, the yellow lamp mussel and the tidewater mucket. These are extensive along the Sebasticook and some of its tributaries (e.g. Sandy Stream). The Sebasticook also provides habitat for riverweed, a rare aquatic plant found in fast-flowing waters. Twentyfive-mile Stream and Fiftenmile Stream, also tributaries of the Sebasticook, have high-quality stretches of Silver Maple Floodplain Forest, a type that is rare statewide. Of particular note the occurrence in the floodplains of bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*), an unusual species in Maine whose distribution is centered in this portion of the state. These floodplain forests are among only a very few in the state with bur oak as an important component, which again heightens their conservation priority. Also found in these forests are several unusual wildflowers, including large populations of spring ephemerals such as trout lilies and bloodroot, as well as wild garlic, rare statewide.



Away from the immediate Sebasticook area are peatlands that have formed in shallow basins over the past several thousand years. Fowler Bog is a 700+ -acre peatland that has formed in a stream valley, where most of the vegetation is still in contact with surface waters (fen, as opposed to bog). Red maple wooded fen vegetation covers much of the area, with some portions more coniferous. Shrubby fens and wet meadows occur along streamsides. It is a good example of this common type of Maine peatland. Nearby, Kanokolus Bog is a raised level bog that shows the difference where peatland vegetation has become raised above the surface water level. This 300-acre bog is more nutrient-poor, with expanses of sheep laurel dwarf shrub bog, some partially wooded areas with stunted black spruce and larch, and some areas with northern white cedar around the edges. Raised bogs are not uncommon in Maine, but become more scarce in central and southern Maine than in northern and eastern Maine, and Kanokolus Bog is considered a good example of this type.

The southern shore of Unity Pond also houses rare species, but is a fairly highly developed area and a low priority for conservation attention. Eagles have nested since 1997 in a small woodland owned by Unity College, but the habitat is considered low priority for eagles from a statewide perspective, and the College is stewarding the area well.

Rare Species and Natural Communities Summary Table

Common Name	Latin Name	EO Rank	Global Rank	State Rank
Tidewater Mucket	<i>Leptodea ochracea</i>	--	G4	S2
Yellow Lamp-mussel	<i>Lampsilis cariosa</i>	--	G3G4	S2S3
Ribbon Snake	<i>Thamnophis sauritus</i>	--	G5	S3
Wood Turtle	<i>Clemmys insculpta</i>	--	G4	S4
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	--	G4	S4
Hardwood Floodplain Forest (3)	--	AB, B, & C	--	S3
Unpatterned Fen Ecosystem	--	B	--	S4
Level Bog Ecosystem	--	B	--	S4
Wild Garlic	<i>Allium canadense</i>	E	G5	S2
Wild Leek	<i>Allium tricoccum</i>	B	G5	S3
American shore-grass	<i>Littorella uniflora</i>	B?	G5	S2
Threadfoot	<i>Podostemum ceratophyllum</i>	BC	G5	S2

Other Resources Mapped by MDIFW

Large Deer Wintering Areas and extensive areas of Wading Bird – Waterfowl Habitat are mapped here.

Protection Status

A small area along Twenty-five Mile Stream is in conservation ownership; otherwise, the land is privately owned.

Conservation Considerations

The most important conservation strategy for aquatic features is maintaining or improving the water quality within the watershed. For lands where timber harvest or development continues, buffers should be maintained around all wetlands and ponds. While different species can have different buffering requirements, wider buffers provide better protection for riparian and wetland-dependent species. The state minimum shoreland zoning standards specify a minimum 75' buffer in which very little harvest or clearing is allowed, with less stringent restrictions within 250' of the wetland border. Better protection will be afforded to the wetlands and ponds if as little alteration as possible occurs within 250' of the wetland/upland border. Any timber harvesting within and adjacent to wetlands or adjacent to ponds should be implemented with strict adherence to Shoreland Zoning guidelines and Maine Forest Service Best Management Practices.

Timber harvest in the vicinity of rare plant populations, and in floodplain forests in general, should be carefully planned to avoid adverse impacts to the flora. Machinery should not be used on the site when the ground is not frozen, as the moist ground would be susceptible to soil compaction and destruction of the existing plants.

The wetlands in particular may be vulnerable to degradation from incidental uses related to increasing residential development. Buffers can play a major role in protection here. ORV use of the area is locally heavy, and care needs to be taken that ORVs stay on existing trails and remain out of all wetlands when the ground is not frozen.

Conservation planning for upland and floodplain forests should include setting some areas aside from timber harvests to allow for the development of some unmanaged forests.

Conservation easements, fee ownership, and tree growth and open space treatments would be appropriate conservation vehicles.