

Alpine Cliff

State Rank S1

Community Description

Herbaceous - bryoid vegetation occurs with a mix of forbs and graminoids in patches over bare rock. Low heath shrubs including alpine bilberry and Labrador tea are present, but the distinctive feature of the vegetation is the herbaceous component. Several montane herbs, such as star saxifrage, hairy arnica, and alpine bistort, may be locally abundant on these seepy sites. The bryoid layer is extensive and may include large patches of the liverwort *Scapania nemorea*.

Soil and Site Characteristics

Sites occur near or above treeline in seeps or rivulets, often associated with vertical to nearly vertical rock faces. The known locations are in cirques, with constant moisture, at elevations above 3000'.



Common Butterwort

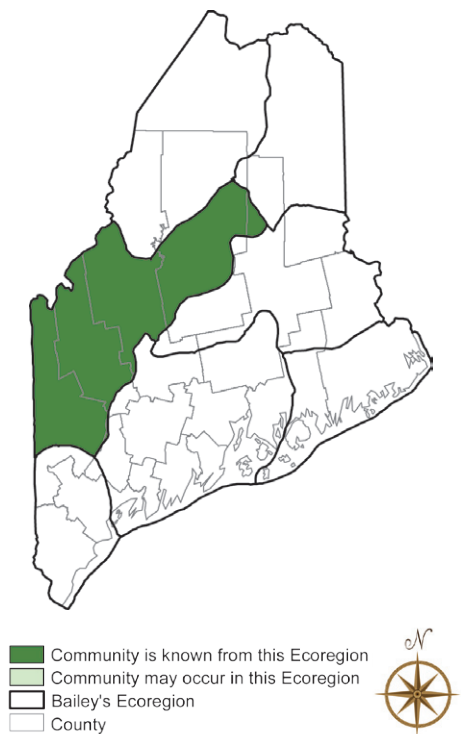
Diagnostics

Sites are at or above treeline, on sheer cliffs or cirque walls, usually with seepage; vegetation is a mixture of herbs, bryophytes, and dwarf shrubs; bulrush sedge is usually present along with other herbaceous species that do not occur at lower elevations.

Similar Types

Other alpine community types occur either on drier substrates (lacking extensive bryophytes) or in boggy situations with peat mosses, cotton-grasses, and heath shrubs dominant. Mountain Alder - Bush-honeysuckle Subalpine Meadows may occur just

Location Map



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below this community, but these are denser and the dominants much taller. Circumneutral Riverside Seeps may share some of the unusual species but are at lower elevations along major rivers.

Conservation, Wildlife, and Management Considerations

The known sites in Maine are on public lands or private conservation lands and somewhat removed from hiking trails. This vegetation is extremely sensitive to foot traffic, but given that access ranges from difficult to dangerous, the sites appear to be protected fairly well by their topography.

Alpine cliffs may provide nesting habitat for common ravens, peregrine falcons, and golden eagles.

Distribution

Restricted in Maine to a few of the state's highest mountains (New England - Adirondack Province). Distribution outside of Maine unknown.

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.

Sapling/shrub

- Mountain alder
- Shrubby cinquefoil*
- Squashberry

Dwarf Shrub

- Alpine bilberry*
- Labrador tea

Herb

- Bluejoint
- Bulrush sedge*
- Deer-hair sedge*
- Highland rush
- Low rough aster*

Associated Rare Plants

- Alpine bistort
- Alpine bitter-cress
- Arctic red fescue
- Bulrush sedge
- Hairy arnica
- Hornemann's willow-herb
- Mountain timothy
- Star saxifrage

Associated Rare Animals

- Golden eagle
- Peregrine falcon

Examples on Conservation Lands You Can Visit

- Mt. Katahdin, Baxter State Park - Piscataquis Co.