**State Rank S5**

**Community Description**

Tall marsh vegetation is dominated by cattails and mostly deciduous shrubs. The cattails may be patchy, locally dominant, and grow taller than the other plant species. Common cattail, narrow-leaved cattail, or both may be present; the latter is common near the coast or in brackish settings and the former is more widespread. Shrubs include winterberry, meadowsweet, and others. The dense growth of shrubs and cattails leaves little room for other herbaceous species; additional occasional species include swamp milkweed, wild calla, and a few sedges and grasses. Bryophytes are usually sparse and occur on vegetation hummocks.

**Similar Types**

Mixed Graminoid-Shrub Marshes share many species, but lack cattails (rarely present at <5% cover) and typically occur in settings that are only temporarily flooded rather than with semi-permanent standing water. Brackish Tidal Marshes and Freshwater Tidal Marshes may have patches of narrow-leaved cattail but usually contain plants indicative of tidal habitats.

**Soil and Site Characteristics**

Cattail marshes often occur in impounded, semi-permanently flooded, and/or nutrient-rich waters. Documented sites are at low elevations (<500') and are generally associated with large basins and adjacent to open water. The substrate is muck or mineral soil rather than peat.

**Diagnostics**

Standing water persists through all or most of season. Sites are non-tidal, and cattails are prominent above a mixture of low shrubs and sedges.

**Conservation, Wildlife, and Management Considerations**

This community is well distributed statewide and apparently well represented (although not well documented) on public lands and private conservation lands. Maintaining appropriate wetland buffers can help ensure that adjacent land uses do not result in degradation.

These deep emergent marshes provide foraging and nesting habitat for a large number of wading birds and waterfowl, including rare species such as the least bittern, common moorhen, and American coot. Black terns may nest colonially in large inland occurrences of this community type with about 50% vegetative and 50% open water. Other birds commonly associated with cattail marshes include Virginia rails, red-winged blackbirds, and marsh wrens.

**Distribution**

Statewide, more common near the coast and at lower inland elevations. Extends southward and westward from Maine, and presumably into Canada.

**Landscape Pattern:** Small Patch

**Characteristic Plants**

- **Sapling/shrub**
  - Leatherleaf
  - Meadowsweet*
  - Sweetgale
  - Winterberry

- **Herb**
  - Common cattail*
  - Narrow-leaved cattail
  - Pickerelweed
  - Small St. Johnswort

**Associated Rare Plants**

- Tall beakrush

**Associated Rare Animals**

- American coot
- Black tern
- Common moorhen
- Least bittern

**Examples on Conservation Lands You Can Visit**

- Alonzo Garcelon Wildlife Management Area – Kennebec Co.
- Hurd's Pond Wildlife Management Area – Waldo Co.
- Jamie’s Pond Wildlife Management Area – Kennebec Co.
- Sebago Lake State Park – Cumberland Co.

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[Location Map]

Variable Darner

Cattail Marsh