

Crescent Beach/Ram Island Focus Area

Cape Elizabeth, Maine

Description:

The Crescent Beach / Ram Island site is oriented around a series of coastal features, the most prominent of which are several distinct sand dune formations and their associated beaches. The dunes at this site support Dune grassland natural communities and are bordered on their landward sides in a few areas by small shrub and marsh dominated wetlands. At Crescent Beach, behind the dunes on the west end, is a pocket of Pitch pine dune woodland natural community, a rare type only found in a few isolated pockets along Maine's south coast. The dune formations at this site vary from fair to good quality for this habitat in Maine. Both of the natural communities found here are vulnerable to loss in Maine due to development along the immediate coast.



Pitch pine dune woodland (from MNAP files)

Dune Grassland is dominated almost exclusively by dune grass with very few other thinly scattered species. Dune grass is the anchor that helps keep the highly exposed sand dune formation in place. Dune grass needs actively accreting sand to survive and will die off if not stimulated to grow by shifting sand. Generally, the very front and back areas of the dunes are transition areas that support a small number of other characteristic plant species. Much of the original dune grassland occurring along this section of the coast is now heavily developed. Dunes and fore dune areas are essential habitat for the Federally Threatened piping plover and the State Endangered least tern. All the remaining viable areas of dune grassland should be preserved and managed as a sensitive natural area. All areas of sand dunes should be posted with signs indicating their fragile nature and regular crossing areas should be well defined and managed to prevent erosion of the dunes.

Pitch pine dune woodlands are generally located on the land-ward side of dune grasslands. The dry acidic sand soils typical of these sites are nutrient poor and make for difficult growing conditions. Dune woodlands are characterized by scattered stunted pitch pines, with occasional gray birch and red maple, and at this site include scattered red oak and quaking aspen. The understory generally includes wild raisin, alder, sweet fern and heath shrubs such as bayberry, sheep laurel, and lowbush blueberry. Herb species are scarce and the ground is often covered with carpets of sedges, grasses, and moss. More recently disturbed areas may have patches of lichens and beach heather beneath the spotty canopy. This community type is only found in the south coastal region of the state and like dune grasslands, has been severely impacted by development of shore front properties. It is currently only known from four isolated locations in Maine.



Color infrared aerial photo of Crescent Beach/Ram Island Area

Two species of rare plant, beach plum and sea-beach sedge, have been recorded from this area. Both plants require the dry sandy soils that are associated with the dune formations. Beach plum is in decline in Maine most likely due to development, and is vulnerable to further loss as development continues in desirable coastal locations. Sea-beach sedge is one of the few sedge species in Maine that can tolerate salt spray.

Rare Species/Natural Community Table for Crescent Beach/Ram Island Focus Area:

Common Name	Latin Name	Status	S-Rank	G-Rank
Exemplary Natural Communities				
Dune grassland		n/a	S2	G4?
Pitch pine dune woodland		n/a	S1	G2
Rare Plants				
Sea-beach sedge	Carex silicea	SC	S3	G5
Beach plum	Prunus maritima	E	S1	G4
Rare Animals				
Piping plover	Charadrius melodus	E	S2B	G3
Least Tern	Sterna antillarum	E	S1B	G4
New England Cottontail	Sylvilagus transitionalis	SC	S2	G4

*see last page for explanation of ranks

Other Resources Mapped by MDIFW:

Coastal Wading Bird / Waterfowl Habitat
 Deer Wintering Area
 Piping Plover / Least Tern Essential Habitat
 Shorebird Roosting and Feeding Areas

Conservation considerations:

- **Residential Development:** Poorly planned development in the area may cause irreversible impacts to the natural systems through fragmentation due to roads and land conversion. Increases in invasive plant species often accompany development.
- **Preserving Natural Communities:** Preserving natural communities and other sensitive features will be best achieved by conserving the integrity of the larger natural systems in which these features occur. Conserving the larger systems helps ensure both common and rare natural features will persist in this part of the state.
- **Off Road Vehicle (ORV) Use and Wetlands:** Where there is use by ORV's care needs to be taken that ORV's stay on existing trails and remain out of wetlands and off of dune features.
- All crossings over dune formations should be well marked to prevent inadvertent straying on to the dunes and subsequent vegetation loss and erosion.
- Nesting and roosting seabirds are particularly sensitive to disturbance and care should be taken to protect these areas from over use by people, especially during nesting time.

Protection Status:

There is significant public conservation ownership within the area, however the majority of the upland buffer is in private non-conservation ownership.

STATE RARITY RANKS

- S1** Critically imperiled in Maine because of extreme rarity (five or fewer occurrences or very few remaining individuals or acres) or because some aspect of its biology makes it especially vulnerable to extirpation from the State of Maine.
- S2** Imperiled in Maine because of rarity (6-20 occurrences or few remaining individuals or acres) or because of other factors making it vulnerable to further decline.
- S3** Rare in Maine (on the order of 20-100 occurrences).
- S4** Apparently secure in Maine.
- S5** Demonstrably secure in Maine.

Note: **State Ranks** are determined by the Maine Natural Areas Program.

GLOBAL RARITY RANKS

- G1** Critically imperiled globally because of extreme rarity (five or fewer occurrences or very few remaining individuals or acres) or because some aspect of its biology makes it especially vulnerable to extirpation from the State of Maine.
- G2** Globally imperiled because of rarity (6-20 occurrences or few remaining individuals or acres) or because of other factors making it vulnerable to further decline.
- G3** Globally rare (on the order of 20-100 occurrences).
- G4** Apparently secure globally.
- G5** Demonstrably secure globally.

Note: **Global Ranks** are determined by The Nature Conservancy.

STATE LEGAL STATUS FOR PLANTS

Note: State legal status is according to 5 M.R.S.A. § 13076-13079, which mandates the Department of Conservation to produce and biennially update the official list of Maine's endangered and threatened plants. The list is derived by a technical advisory committee of botanists who use data in the Natural Areas Program's database to recommend status changes to the Department of Conservation.

- E** ENDANGERED; Rare and in danger of being lost from the state in the foreseeable future, or federally listed as Endangered.
- T** THREATENED; Rare and, with further decline, could become endangered; or federally listed as Threatened.
- SC** SPECIAL CONCERN; Rare in Maine, based on available information, but not sufficiently rare to be considered Threatened or Endangered.

Visit our web site for more information on rare, threatened and endangered species!
<http://www.state.me.us/doc/nrimc/mnap/factsheets/mnapfact.htm>