

Cutler West

Cutler, Maine

Description:

The Cutler West focus area encompasses two peninsulas that lie west of the town of Cutler. Several peatlands of statewide significance and the Sprague Neck waterfowl habitat are among the most noteworthy ecological features within this focus area.

Kelley Heath is a roughly 225 acre wetland located east of Route 191 and just south of a gated former Navy road. The wetland includes a 125-acre coastal plateau bog surrounded by black spruce flats. The main part of the bog, which was apparently bull-dozed about 30 years ago, is dominated by deer-hair sedge (*Trichophorum cespitosum*) and black crowberry. Other common herbs and shrubs include tussock cotton-grass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*), sheep laurel (*Kalmia angustifolia*), bog laurel (*Kalmia polifolia*), small cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*), Labrador tea (*Rhododendron groenlandicum*) and black chokeberry (*Photinia melanocarpa*). Vegetation is quite uniform. Other than the removal of the



Kelley Heath

tree and shrub layer, the surface disturbance apparently had a limited long-term affect on the bog's vegetation. The southwest portion of the bog may not have been disturbed, based on the greater abundance of dwarf black spruce, other shrubs, and hummocks and hollows. Overall, this is one of the larger examples of a coastal plateau bog, and it is exhibiting good recovery from past disturbance.

The North Cutler Heaths consist of three proximal peatlands, ranging from 10 to 29 acres in size. These coastal plateau bogs are located north of the Ridge Road, just east of the former Cutler Navy base. The middle of these three peatlands supports black crowberry and sheep laurel on the raised surface of the bog. Other common herbs include bog laurel, small cranberry, Labrador tea, baked apple-berry (*Rubus chamaemorus*), leatherleaf (*Chamaedaphne calyculata*), and deer-hair sedge. There is a fairly distinct marginal slope, but vegetation zonation is not as clear as some other bogs. Over 50 Dragon's mouth orchids (*Arethusa bulbosa*) are scattered in these bogs. This orchid is not listed as rare in Maine, but it is quite uncommon.

West Cutler Heath is a coastal plateau bog on former Navy property, east of Sprague Neck. Black crowberry, baked apple-berry, and sheep laurel dominate the herb layer in most of the bog. Also common are deer hair sedge, bog laurel, small cranberry, Labrador tea and lowbush blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium*). Dragon's mouth orchid is frequent. Two old roadbeds or railroad grades have altered the bog. One, running roughly north-south, appears to have impounded the water on the east side of the bog. The other old roadbed, running roughly east-west, cuts through the middle of the bog; black spruce and larch were clustered along the north side of this raised road, where some organic material may have been pushed when the road was created.

Two of the coastal bog ecosystems host the crowberry blue – a state rare butterfly that feeds on black crowberry in its larval stage. In addition, the Cutler West focus area also includes important habitat for other wildlife species. There is a good deal of high quality habitat for coastal waterfowl and wading birds especially in the vicinity of Sprague Neck. The Little Machias Bay tidal flats are prime feeding and roosting areas for shorebirds and the tips of both peninsulas are essential nesting habitat for bald eagles.

Rare Species and Exemplary Natural Community Table for Cutler West

Common Name	Latin Name	S-RANK	G-RANK	State Status
<i>Exemplary Natural Communities</i>				
Coastal Plateau Bog Ecosystem		S3	N/A	N/A
<i>Rare Animals</i>				
Bald eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	S4	G4	T
Crowberry Blue	<i>Lycaeides empetri idas</i>	S2	G5	SC

Other Habitats Mapped by MDIFW:

Tidal Waterfowl / Wading Bird Habitat
 Freshwater Waterfowl / Wading Bird Habitat
 Bald Eagle Essential Habitat
 Shorebird Feeding and Roosting Areas

Conservation Considerations:

- In general, the greatest threats to peatlands include peat mining, cranberry harvesting, timber harvest around the forested perimeters, and development.
- The ecological integrity of peatlands, including all the processes and life forms they support, are dependent on the maintenance of the current hydrology and water quality of these systems. Intensive timber harvesting, vegetation clearing, soil disturbance, new roads, and development on buffering uplands can result in greater runoff, sedimentation, and other non-point sources of pollution.
- Peatland systems benefit from establishing and/or maintaining vegetative buffers around their perimeter wherever possible. A buffer of 250 feet or more will serve to limit impacts from adjacent development, help prevent erosion, limit colonization of invasive species, and prevent unnecessary impacts from off road vehicle use.
- Maintenance of the open grassland habitat may have created favorable habitat for grassland birds. Future management for wildlife could consider maintaining a mowing regime.

Protection Status:

The U.S. Navy formerly owned roughly 3,000 acres as a communications center. In the fall of 2003, a purchase and sale agreement was made with the Cutler Development Corporation and the Sunset Group LLC to re-develop the base. Re-development will tentatively include residences, commercial buildings. It is not clear whether special protection will be granted to ecologically important areas.