

# Great Cranberry Island Heath

## Cranberry Isles

**Description:**

This focus area, located on the southwestern portion of Great Cranberry Island, consists chiefly of a 175-acre Coastal Plateau Bog Ecosystem in outstanding condition. Although it is not as large or dramatic as some other coastal bog systems in Downeast Maine, the location of Great Cranberry Island Heath at the southern geographic limit of this ecosystem type, coupled with its excellent condition, make it one of the best examples of this ecosystem type in Maine. Information on it was obtained by University of Maine researchers in the 1980s; it is a current priority to revisit the site and update this information.

The peatland occupies a shallow sand- and gravel-surfaced basin and is bordered by small hills. It appears to drain westerly and southwesterly to the sea via two low corridors between hills. The bog exhibits characteristic zonation that includes a well-developed black crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*) community with abundant baked apple-berry (*Rubus chamaemorus*) and lawns of deer-hair sedge (*Trichophorum cespitosum*). Black crowberry, baked apple-berry, and deer hair sedge are all characteristic plants of coastal bogs in Downeast Maine. Interestingly, these truly boreal plants also occur in alpine areas of Western Maine and New Hampshire – the common feature being the cool summer climate. Common juniper (*Juniperus communis*) and islands of black spruce (*Picea mariana*) are locally abundant in the bog. Only a relatively small central area of the bog is raised and it lacks the steep marginal slopes characteristic of some coastal bogs. The raised area consists of shrub-heath and wooded shrub-heath dominated by black spruce, dwarf huckleberry (*Gaylussacia dumosa*), and peat moss (*Sphagnum fuscum*). On its northern slope the raised plateau is more heavily wooded with black spruce and on its other sides it slopes down to moss-lawn/sedge/shrub-heath fen. The south side of the western drainage corridor consists of a very wet open fen with abundant white beak-rush (*Rhynchospora alba*). A different peat moss, *Sphagnum pulchrum*, is the dominant moss in this wet fen. The peripheral margins of the peatland are sparsely wooded with black spruce. Peat depths range from 5.5 meters in the raised plateau area to 2-3 meters in the open fen areas and shallower in the peripheral wooded fens.

The coastal shores adjacent to Great Cranberry Island Heath have been mapped as tidal waterfowl and wading bird habitat.

**Rare Species and Exemplary Natural Community Table for Great Cranberry Island Heath**

Common Name	Latin Name	S-RANK	G-RANK	State Status
<i>Exemplary Natural Communities</i>				
Coastal Plateau Bog Ecosystem		S3	N/A	N/A

**Other Habitats Mapped by MDIFW:**

Tidal Waterfowl / Wading Bird Habitat

**Conservation Considerations:**

- In general, threats to peatlands include peat mining, hydrologic alteration, timber harvest around the forested perimeters, and inappropriate adjacent development.
- Invasive plant species such as common reed (*Phragmites australis*) and purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) may pose future threats to this wetland.

- 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.

***Protection Status:***

The focus area is currently in private ownership.