

Pleasant Bay

Addison, Harrington, Milbridge and Columbia Falls

Description:

The Pleasant Bay focus area encompasses the entire coastline, islands, and tidal estuaries of the greater Narraguagus-Pleasant Bay region, as well as the adjacent Harrington Heath. The focus area includes three river drainages: the Narraguagus River, the Harrington River, and the Pleasant River; the Narraguagus River serves as the western margin of the focus area and the Pleasant River and eastern shore of Pleasant Bay serve as the eastern margin. Both the Narraguagus and the Pleasant Rivers are important to numerous anadromous fish species, including wild Atlantic salmon. The extensive mudflats lining the river mouths and adjacent coves and coastal areas are important staging areas for major concentrations of shorebirds during autumn migration.

Narraguagus Bay--Narraguagus River to the Harrington River

The mouth of the Narraguagus River from the town of Milbridge to the open bay is an area of extensive mudflats that serve as good feeding habitat for shorebirds of all sizes. In addition several tiny islands and ledges provide roosting habitat for these birds such as Long Point and Mitchell Point. Back Bay is considered one of the better shorebird feeding areas. Birds that feed here may roost at Pinkham Island, which is a very important roosting site for shorebirds. The Mill River and Flat Bay also offer extensive mudflats that provide superb feeding especially for smaller shorebirds.

Just west of the town of Harrington, an approximately 120 acre coastal crowberry bog, known as Harrington Heath supports the state rare crowberry blue butterfly. The mouth of the Harrington River is nearly all mudflats at low tide, and hosts some shorebirds. West Carrying Place stands out as an important portion of the Harrington estuary because of its high use by medium sized shorebirds and black ducks in autumn.

Pleasant River Saltmarsh

At nearly 700 acres, the tidal marsh complex along the Pleasant River is the largest salt marsh ecosystem in the Eastern Coastal Region. It contains three distinct parts: the mainstem is the largest, the West Branch has the heaviest history of human use, and the Dyer Cove is the smallest but perhaps least disturbed. In 2000 MNAP staff visited the large marshes along the lower portion of the river in Addison.

The salt marshes along the lower portion of the river in Addison are bounded by meanders in the river and contain many small natural salt pannes (i.e., sparsely vegetated pools that fill at high tide). Vegetation is typical of salt



Color infra-red air photo of Pleasant River Salt Marsh (1991)

marshes throughout coastal Maine. Saltmeadow cordgrass (*Spartina patens*) and saltmarsh cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) share dominance, and black-grass (*Juncus gerardii*) is also abundant. Other common species include saltmarsh bulrush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*), red fescue (*Festuca rubra*), common arrow-grass (*Triglochin maritimum*), and seaside plantain (*Plantago maritima*).

A substantial component of the marshes at the mouth of the Pleasant River and West Branch have been drained in the past. Several areas of marsh contain evidently raised levees about ten feet back from the riverbank. These levees consist of fine-grained sediments that support drier-site species typical of disturbed ground, such as quack grass (*Elymus repens*). These levees are the result of draining and ditching efforts that began in the 1700s and continued until the 1930s. These efforts, designed to improve the hay-growing capacity of the marsh, resulted in an elaborate system of ditches, dikes, and floodgates. The ditches and floodgates allowed freshwater to exit while restricting the entry of salt water, and the levees further provided a barrier against incoming tides. Floodgates were removed or fell into disrepair in the 1930s, and the marshes have been naturally "recovering" ever since, as ditches gradually silt in. However, parts of old wooden structures used to stabilize the ditches remain evident today (see photo below), and many ditches remain obvious on air photos.

Of 30 Downeast salt marshes surveyed for diurnal bird use by MDIFW in 1999, the Pleasant River salt marsh had by far the highest species richness, with 29 species detected. In addition to the wildlife value of the salt marsh proper, it is also noteworthy that Carrying Place Cove on the western portion of the lower reaches of the Pleasant River is perhaps the most important shorebird roosting site in the region especially on East Carrying Place Cove Island.



Ditch in the Pleasant River Salt Marsh

Rare Species and Exemplary Natural Community Table for Pleasant Bay

Common Name	Latin Name	S-RANK	G-RANK	State Status
<i>Exemplary Natural Communities</i>				
Salt-Hay Saltmarsh		S3	N/A	N/A
<i>Rare Animals</i>				
Bald eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	S4	G4	T
Crowberry blue	<i>Lycaeides idas empetri</i>	S2	G5	SC

Other Habitats Mapped by MDIFW:

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

Conservation Considerations:

- Much of this large salt marsh has been altered in the past, although natural recovery has occurred over the last 70 years. Sections of this marsh may be good candidates for salt marsh restoration, including plugging of the ditches, restoration of tidal flow, and creation of salt pannes.
- Although a few invasive species occur on the periphery of the marsh, it is largely devoid of aggressive plants such as common reed (*Phragmites australis*) that have colonized other disturbed salt marshes in the northeast.

Protection Status:

Nearly the entire marsh is within private ownership. The town of Addison owns small parcels along the river, including the boat launch area (not shown as conservation land on map). The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife owns approximately 20 acres of salt marsh in Columbia Falls.