

Key Habitat Descriptions

2015 Wildlife Action Plan Revision



1. Upland Forest

Upland forest habitats are characterized by deciduous trees, coniferous trees, or a mix forming 60-100% canopy cover. A well-developed understory is generally present, but may be absent in forests composed of shade tolerant trees. This key habitat classification includes eight sub-habitats determined to be important to wildlife (a) Oak Forests, (b) Calcareous Forests, (c) Coniferous Forests, (d) Old Growth Forests, (e) Northern Hardwood Forests, (f) Mixed Hardwood Forests, (g) Young Forests, and (h) Maritime Forests. Examples of Upland Forests include Housatonic State Forest in the northwest corner and Meshomasic State Forest in central Connecticut.

2. Upland Woodland and Shrub

Upland Woodland and Shrub habitats are characterized deciduous trees, coniferous trees, or a mix where tree crowns generally do not touch each other (25-60% canopy cover). These woodlands include a variety of shrubs, herbs and non-vascular plants in the understory and groundcover. This key habitat classification includes four sub-habitats determined to be important to wildlife: (a) Red Cedar Glades, (b) Pitch Pine and Scrub Oak Woodlands, (c) Maritime Shrublands, and (d) Reverting Field and Early Successional Shrubland. Examples include West Rock Ridge State Park in Hamden (Red Cedar Glade), Hopeville Pond Natural Area Preserve in Griswold (Pitch Pine and Scrub Oak Woodland), and Hammonasset Natural Area Preserve in Madison (Maritime Shrubland).

3. Upland Herbaceous

Upland Herbaceous habitats are characterized by herbaceous plants such as grasses, herbs and ferns, forming 25% or more of the ground cover. Areas with scattered trees, shrubs and dwarf-shrubs are included where they provide less than 25% cover. This key habitat classification includes five sub-habitats determined to be important to wildlife: (a) Coastal Dunes, (b) Grassy Glades and Balds, (c) Sand barrens and Sparsely Vegetated Sand and Gravel, (d) Warm Season Grasslands, and (e) Cool Season Grasslands. Examples of Upland Herbaceous habitats include Bushy Point State Beach in Groton (Costal Dunes), Talcott Mountain State Park in Simbury (Grassy Glades and Balds), and Clarkhurst Wildlife Management Area in Haddam (Warm Season Grassland).

4. Forested Inland Wetland

Forested Inland Wetland habitats are characterized by wetland soils and are dominated by evergreen or deciduous trees with crowns forming 60-100 % canopy cover. The Red Maple Swamps, Atlantic White Cedar Swamps, Red/Black Spruce Swamps, and Northern White Cedar Swamps are all characterized by having topographical basins containing decomposed peats and mucks, with slow moving or stagnant water. The distinguishing feature among them is the dominant tree species. This key habitat classification includes five sub-habitats determined to be important to wildlife: (a) Atlantic White Cedar Swamps, (b) Red/Black Spruce Swamps, (c) Northern White Cedar Swamps, (d) Floodplain Forests, and (e) Red Maple Swamps. Examples include Chester Cedar Swamp National Natural Landmark in Chester (Atlantic White Cedar Swamp), Holleran Swamp in Colebrook (Red Spruce Swamp), and Wangunk Meadows Wildlife Management Area in Portland (Floodplain Forest).

5. Shrub Inland Wetland

Shrub Inland Wetland habitats are characterized by wetland soils and shrubs generally greater than 1.5 feet arranged individually or clumped. The shrub layer generally forms more than 25% of the canopy cover, with any trees present forming less than 25% of the canopy. This key habitat classification includes two sub-habitats determined to be

important to wildlife: (a) Bogs and Fens and (b) Shrub Swamps. Shrub Swamps are variable in composition and include red maple sapling swamps, willow and alder thickets, and highbush blueberry/swamp azalea swamps. Bogs and Fens are natural peatlands that occur in topographic basins influenced by ground water. Examples of Shrub Inland Wetlands include Mohawk Mountain Black Spruce Bog in Cornwall and Pachaug State Forest in Voluntown.

6. Herbaceous Inland Wetland

Herbaceous Inland Wetland habitats are wetlands dominated by an herbaceous layer of grasses, forbs, and ferns and include less than 25% of scattered tree, shrub, and dwarf-shrub cover. This key habitat classification includes three sub-habitats determined to be important to wildlife: (a) Calcareous Spring Fens, (b) Freshwater Marshes, and (c) Wet Meadows. Examples include Beeslick Pond in Salisbury (Calcareous Spring Fen) and Charter Marsh in Tolland (Freshwater Marsh).

7. Tidal Wetland

The Tidal Wetland habitat is characterized by diurnally flooded areas, typically dominated by herbaceous plants, though some may have trees or shrubs or be sparsely vegetated. This key habitat includes two sub-habitats determined to be important to wildlife: (a) Salt and Brackish Marshes and (b) Intertidal Beaches, Flats, and Shores. Examples of Tidal Wetlands include the Great Meadow Salt Marsh in Stratford and the Charles E. Wheeler Wildlife Management Area in Milford.

8. Freshwater Aquatic

Freshwater Aquatic habitats in Connecticut encompass a variety of bodies of water including large rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds. These include both vegetated and non-vegetated habitats. The vegetation may be either emergent or submerged. This key habitat classification includes six sub-habitats determined to be important to wildlife: (a) Large Rivers and Their Associated Riparian Zones, (b) Unrestricted Free-flowing Streams, (c) Cold Water Streams, (d) Head-of-Tide and Coastal Streams, (e) Lakes and their Shorelines, and (f) Coastal Plain Ponds. Examples of Freshwater Aquatic Habitats include the Connecticut and Housatonic Rivers and tributaries.

9. Estuarine Aquatic

Estuarine Aquatic habitats of Connecticut include coastal and tidal waters of varying salinity and substrates that are associated with Long Island Sound. The habitat includes all zones of the Sound and upstream areas influenced by tides with intermediate salinity levels (at least 0.5 ppt). Indicator communities include all resident estuarine and marine species, such as striped bass, bluefish, winter flounder, sea robins, killifish, tomcod, and hogchokers, as well as diadromous migrators, such as American shad, herring, sea lamprey, and smelt. This key habitat classification includes eight sub-habitats determined to be important to wildlife: (a) Coastal Rivers, Coves and Embayments, (b) Vegetation Beds, (c) Hard Bottoms, (d) Sponge Beds, (e) Shellfish Reefs and Beds, (f) Sedimentary Bottoms, (g) Open Water, and (h) Algal Beds. Examples of Estuarine Aquatic habitats include the Lower Connecticut River (Coastal River), Bluff Point State Park in Gorton (Vegetation Bed), and Falkner Island (Sponge Bed).

10. Unique, Natural, and Man-Made

Unique, Natural and Man-made habitats not discussed in the previous key habitats include eleven sub-habitats determined to be important to wildlife: (a) Traprock Ridges, (b) Offshore Islands, (c) Coastal Bluffs and Headlands, (d) Caves and Other Subterranean Habitats, (e) Urban and Man-made Features, (f) Cliffs and Talus Slopes, (g) Surface Springs and Seeps, (h) Vernal Pools, (i) Agricultural Lands, (j) Navigational Channels, Breakwaters, Jetties, and Piers, and (k) Public Utility Transmission Corridors. These sub-categories may share characteristics of one or more of the habitats described in detail above, but they have some unique features that require them to be considered separately for evaluation of condition and conservation planning.