

Terrestrial & Palustrine Plant Communities Of Pennsylvania

By Jean Fike

Open sedge (*Carex stricta*, *C. prairea*, *C. lacustris*) fen

These are open sedge-dominated wetlands, which usually occur on organic soil (sedge peat) saturated throughout most of the year by base-rich groundwater. These sites usually lack the distinct seepage areas associated with other fen types. Surface water pH is generally between 6.9 and 7.9 during the growing season. Sedges dominate, usually by some combination of *Carex prairea*^S (prairie sedge), *C. stricta* (tussock sedge), *C. sterilise* (Atlantic sedge), *C. lacustris* (a sedge), *C. aquatilis*^S (water sedge), *C. leptalea* (a sedge), *C. lasiocarpa*^S (many-fruited sedge), and *C. tetanica*^S (Wood's sedge). Additional characteristic herbaceous species include *Pycnanthemum virginianum* (mountain-mint), *Verbena hastata* (blue vervain), *Smilacina stellata* (starflower), *Eupatorium maculatum* (spotted joe-pye-weed), *Typha latifolia* (common cat-tail), *Epilobium leptophyllum* (wil-low-herb), *Callum tinctorium* (cleavers), *Onoclea sensibilis* (sensitive fern), *Cirsium muticum* (swamp thistle), *Impatiens capensis* (jewelweed), *Juncus articus*' (Baltic rush), *Aster puniceus* ssp. *firmus* (purple-stemmed aster), and *Polemonium reptans* (spreading Jacob's-ladder). Typical bryophytes include *Sphagnum teres*, *Campylium stellatum*, and *Thuidium delicatulum*. These fens typically lack a substantial shrub layer. This may be due to excessive moisture, but in many cases disturbance—including cattle grazing, or more rarely, repeated fire—keeps these sites open.

Related types: Ecologically, this type resembles the herbaceous patches within the two shrub fen types: "Poison sumac - red-cedar - bayberry fen" and "Buckthorn - sedge fen." All three descriptions should be read carefully before classifying a site.

Range: Ridge and Valley, Piedmont.

Selected references: Wagner and Bier 1995.

[Crosswalk: Smith's "Hillside Graminoid-Forb Fen," TNC's (proposed) *Carex stricta*-*Carex prairea* Herbaceous Alliance.]