

# Terrestrial & Palustrine Plant Communities Of Pennsylvania

By Jean Fike

## Birch (black-gum) rocky slope woodland

This community type most often occurs on talus, scree or other rocky slopes. Although most typical of slopes, it may also occur on benches, ridgetops, or boulderfields. Birch, usually *Betula lenta* (sweet birch) or less commonly *B. papyrifera* (paper birch), *B. populifolia* (gray birch), or *B. alleghaniensis* (yellow birch), is nearly always present. Either birch or *Nyssa sylvatica* (black-gum) may be dominant. Associated tree species include *Tsuga canadensis* (eastern hemlock), *Acer rubrum* (red maple), *Carya glabra* (pignut hickory), *Quercus montana* (chestnut oak), *Q. alba* (white oak), *Q. velutina* (black oak), and *Q. coccinea* (scarlet oak). Other woody species include *Kalmia latifolia* (mountain laurel), *Viburnum acerifolium* (maple-leaved viburnum), *Hamamelis virginiana* (witch hazel), *Ribes* spp., *Vitis* spp., *Toxicodendron radicans* (poison ivy), and *Parthenocissus quinquefolia* (Virginia-creeper). The herbaceous layer is sparse; representative species include *Dryopteris marginalis* (common wood fern), *Polypodium virginianum* (rock polypody), *Woodsia obtusa* (blunt-lobed woodsia), and *Asplenium platyneuron* (ebony spleenwort). There are often rich bryophyte and lichen assemblages associated with these communities. The composition of this type is variable and often responds to aspect. On north-facing slopes, *Tsuga canadensis* (eastern hemlock) may become dominant. More information is needed to determine if such variation warrants additional types.

**Related types:** The "Black-gum ridgetop forest" may have an open canopy in places, but is characteristic of ridgetops rather than scree or talus slopes. Where the canopy is becoming closed, this type may grade into a variety of forest types.

**Range:** Pittsburgh Plateau, Ridge and Valley.

**[Crosswalk:** Smith's "Talus Slope Forest"- much modified, TNC - no crosswalk, SAF - no crosswalk.]