

Terrestrial & Palustrine Plant Communities Of Pennsylvania

By Jean Fike

Pitch pine - rhodora - scrub oak woodland

This community is part of the "Mesic till barren complex." This is a unique group of communities restricted to the southern Pocono Plateau. The barren-like vegetation does not appear to be a response to droughty or nutrient-poor soils. The same deep, fine-loamy Illinoian till on which it occurs also underlies the adjacent forests (Latham et al. 1996). The origin of the barrens, and the processes responsible for their persistence and distribution are not known, but fire appears to be a critical factor. Please see the description of the "Mesic till barren complex" for more information. Included here are all areas of the complex with at least 10% cover by trees, mostly *Pinus rigida* (pitch pine) and *Acer rubrum* (red maple). *Rhododendron canadense* (rhodora) and *Quercus ilicifolia* (scrub oak), with a mixture of *Vaccinium angustifolium* (low sweet blueberry) and *Kalmia angustifolia* (sheep laurel), dominate the shrub layer. The most abundant species in the herbaceous and creeping shrub layer are *Carex pensylvanica* (Pennsylvania sedge), *Oryzopsis racemosa* (ricegrass), *Rubus hispidus* (swamp dewberry), *Pteridium aquilinum* (bracken fern), and *Gaultheria procumbens* (teaberry). Other species include *Amianthium muscaetoxicum* (fly-poison), *Aster umbellatus* (flat-topped aster), *Calamagrostis cinnoides* (reedgrass), and the globally rare species *Carex polymorpha*^S (variable sedge) and *Lygodium palmatum*^S (climbing fern).

Related types: This type is superficially similar to the much more common "Pitch pine - scrub oak woodland" type. Location, mesic soil conditions, and the importance of rhodora in the shrub layer distinguish this highly restricted community type. See the description of the "Mesic till barren complex" for a more detailed ecological description.

Range: Pocono Plateau.

Selected references: Davis et al. 1991, Latham et al. 1996.

[**Crosswalk:** Smith's "Mesic Scrub Oak - Heath - Pitch Pine Barrens" (in part), TNC's *Pinus rigida* Seasonally Flooded (sic.) Woodland Alliance, *Pinus rigida* - *Quercus ilicifolia* - *Rhododendron canadense* Community, SAF's Pitch pine (45).]