



Upland Natural Communities

Upland natural communities are those in which water is almost always present in sufficient quantities to support plant life, but is not present in abundance for most of the growing season. Soils are not saturated, nor does flooding last long in these communities, if it occurs at all. The dominant plants are characteristic of moist to well-drained soils, rather than of saturated or flooded soils.

The variety in upland natural communities has a great deal to do with water, however, since the availability of moisture is one of the key factors in determining plant distribution. As described in Part One, a number of factors influence upland natural communities including, along with soil moisture, bedrock geology, surficial geology, soil texture, slope, aspect, elevation, natural disturbance processes such as fire, wind, and flooding, and human history.

Soil moisture probably plays the most significant role in distinguishing between our two main kinds of upland communities, **Upland Forests and Woodlands** and **Open Uplands**.

Upland Forests and Woodlands are dominated by trees, which cover more than 25 percent of the ground when the community is viewed from the air. These are the dominant natural communities in the eastern United States where moisture is abundant and adequate to support tree growth in most places. There is great variety in these forests, as is described in the following sections.

Open Uplands, which are naturally uncommon in Vermont and in the east, are either devoid of trees or they have only scattered and occasional trees. The reasons for lack of trees include excessive drought or thin soils; steep slopes, slope instability, cold temperatures, flooding, and ice scour.

► **How to IDENTIFY**

Upland Forests and Woodlands and Open Uplands Natural Communities

Using the guide below, distinguish between **Upland Forests and Woodlands** and **Open Uplands**, and go to the page indicated.



Upland Forests and Woodlands: Trees are common to abundant, covering more than 25 percent of the area when viewed from above. Read “Upland Forests and Woodlands” beginning on page 84, then go to the “How to Identify” key on page 94.



Open Uplands: Trees are scattered or lacking; overall they cover less than 25 percent of the area. Herbs, low shrubs, mosses, and lichens are the dominant vegetation. Read “Open Uplands” beginning on page 187, then go to the “How to Identify” key on page 189.

