



## Open or Shrub Wetlands

This broad classification category includes all those wetland community types that are dominated by bryophytes, herbaceous plants, and shrubs of varying heights. Trees are generally absent or sparse from the communities described here due to the long duration of flooding or inundation found in many marshes and shrub swamps, the scouring and flooding that occurs in shoreline communities, or the very low availability of dissolved oxygen and minerals found in raised peatlands. All the natural communities in this section have less than 25 percent cover of trees, except for three types. Black Spruce Woodland Bog and Pitch Pine Woodland Bog both have greater than 25 percent cover of trees but are included in the Peatlands section due to their close ecological similarity with Dwarf Shrub Bogs. Similarly, Alluvial Shrub Swamps are included here even though they occasionally have significant tree cover.

## Open or Shrub Wetland Natural Communities

1. What are the natural processes that are keeping the wetland in an open or shrubby condition? Study the land use history of the wetland and adjacent uplands. Has there been a recent natural or human disturbance that has created the open or shrubby condition? Is there recent beaver activity? If humans created the open condition, the community may not be covered in this book.
2. What is the landscape position of the wetland? Is it on a high mountain ridge or a flat lowland depression? Is it associated with a lake, pond, river, or stream?
3. What is the hydrologic regime of the wetland? Is there permanent standing water? How deep? Is there evidence of fluctuating water levels? Is the wetland periodically flooded or scoured by an adjacent river or stream? Is there evidence of groundwater seepage at the margin of the wetland?
4. Examine the soils and determine if they are organic or mineral. For organic soils, what is the thickness and degree of decomposition of the organic layer? For mineral soils, what is the texture and are the soils gleyed or mottled? Are the mineral soils the result of alluvial deposition from an adjacent river?
5. Study the vegetation. What are the dominant plants? Mosses? Sedges? Cattails? Speckled alder? Is the vegetation dense or sparse?
6. Use the key below to determine which of the Open or Shrub Wetlands you are in and go to the page indicated to learn more.



**Open Peatlands:** These peat-accumulating wetlands have stable water tables at or near the soil surface, generally lack seasonal flooding, and mosses and liverworts are consistently abundant. Trees are generally absent or sparse, except for in Black Spruce Woodland Bog and Pitch Pine Woodland Bog. Go to page 311.



**Marshes and Sedge Meadows:** These wetlands have standing or slowly moving water with depths that may fluctuate seasonally. The soils are primarily mineral, with well-decomposed organic mucks in some cases. Herbaceous plants are dominant. Go to page 337.



**Wet Shores:** These sparsely vegetated wetland communities occur along the shores of rivers and lakes and are subject to seasonal flooding and scouring. The soils are mineral and include mud, sand, gravel, and cobble. Go to page 354.



**Shrub Swamps:** These shrub-dominated wetlands typically have significant seasonal flooding and variable soil types. Shrubs that typically dominate include speckled alder, willow, sweet gale, and buttonbush. Go to page 375.