

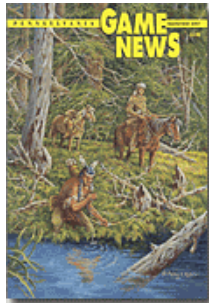


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## Pennsylvania's Wildlife Action Plan (PA-WAP) PART IIB

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### 21.1 Location and Condition of Thicket/Shrubland Habitats

Temporal shrublands/thickets are not easily quantified in current inventory and mapping methods. As a result, there is no accurate estimate for the amount of acreage in temporal thicket habitats. Furthermore, early-successional habitats are defined differently by different people. Wildlife that inhabits a second-year field as compared to an overgrown orchard or 10-year-old forest are quite different. Thus, it is important to keep definitions in mind. In 1989, the U.S. Department of Agriculture forest inventory (Alerich 1993) found that about 15 percent of Pennsylvania's timberland (three million acres) was in the sapling stage, or young forest.

In Pennsylvania, these early-successional forests are in decline (McWilliams et al. 1995). From 1978 to 2002, the total acreage in Pennsylvania forestland remained stable, but the proportion in early-successional stages (seedling, sapling and non-stocked) declined from 20.7 percent to 11.8 percent (Alerich 1993, McWilliams et al. 1995). While the aging of trees is the primary factor in loss of key habitats, factors such as highway and urban development, intensification of agriculture, and slowing farm abandonment all contributed to decreasing quantity and quality of optimum thicket habitats.

#### Naturally-Occurring Barrens

Pennsylvania has four major barrens community complexes (including ridgetop acidic barrens, mesic-till barrens, serpentine barrens, and shale barrens) and several minor shrubland community types (Table 21.1). Most barrens communities are restricted to xeric-shallow soils, with the exception of mesic-till barrens found on the Pocono Plateau.

Table 21.1: Barrens community types found in Pennsylvania. For detailed descriptions, readers are referred to the following sections of Appendix 4:

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The mesic-till barrens, located on the southern edge of the Pocono Plateau in northeastern Pennsylvania, include the largest areas of barrens vegetation in Pennsylvania. They are dominated by scrub oak, sheep laurel, lowbush blueberries and

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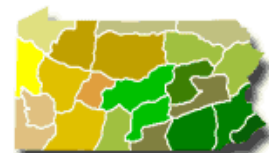
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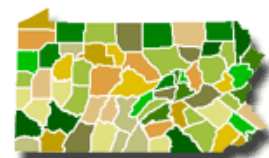
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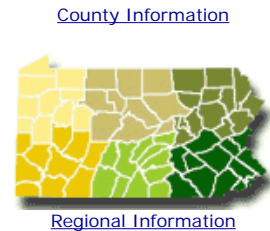
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rhodora, and have a shrub-savanna appearance with an open overstory of pitch pine (Latham et al. 1996). Unlike many of the barrens in eastern North America, which typically grow in excessively drained soils or shallow-to-bedrock substrates, these barrens grow in mesic soils forming in glacial till. Some plants characterized as wetland indicator species comprise a significant portion of the barrens, along with other more xeric vegetation typical of barrens communities (Latham et al. 1996). These barrens contain the highest concentration of globally-rare plant and animal species in Pennsylvania (Davis et al. 1991).



The ridgetop acidic barrens community consists primarily of scrub oak barrens, pitch pine-scrub oak barrens, and some heath barrens. Scrub oak is the dominant canopy species with pitch pine, black gum, chestnut oak, and sassafras occurring in localized patches and infrequently scattered throughout. The barrens are primarily restricted to the highest, most-exposed portions of the ridge and are surrounded by slopes and drainages with mixed hardwood forests. Known locations of ridgetop acidic barrens occur in Lackawanna County (Moosic Mountain barrens), Luzerne County (Arbutus Peak barrens), Centre County (Scotia barrens), and Schuylkill County. The Moosic Mountain barrens was recognized in the Lackawanna Natural Area Inventory as one of the largest barrens complexes in Pennsylvania and graded good to excellent in quality. The Scotia barrens are a pitch pine-scrub oak barrens system that lies in a region of uncharacteristic temperature ranges which, in normal conditions, can produce a month of subzero minimum temperatures per year and frost in midsummer (ClearWater News 2004). According to the Centre County Natural Heritage Inventory, the unique topography makes it an area of exceptional significance from a biodiversity standpoint. WAP-priority species associated with ridgetop acidic barrens complex include Allegheny woodrat, timber rattlesnake, eastern hognose snake, northern copperhead, and Appalachian cottontail.

The serpentine barrens are located along the Pennsylvania and Maryland border in Lancaster and Chester counties. There are a total of eight sites, seven in Pennsylvania, totaling 2,100 acres, the largest expanse of serpentine vegetation in eastern temperate North America. These barrens represent those areas where serpentinite bedrock is either exposed or is near enough to the surface to influence soil properties. A site conservation plan for the serpentine barrens conducted by the Pennsylvania Science Office (PSO) of The Nature Conservancy (TNC), as well as TNC, identified the serpentine vegetation as the conservation target, which is defined as any assemblage of plants with a large proportion of species having high regional fidelity to soils weathered from ultramafic rocks (Latham 2000.) According to PSO, these barrens are ranked as highly significant to significant and contain many rare plant and animal species.

The shale barrens are located in southcentral Pennsylvania, specifically Fulton, Bedford and Huntingdon counties. A shale barren is a steep south-facing slope where the bedrock is composed of shale and the rocky, dark, shale soils can reach temperatures of 140-degrees F when the sun is shining full strength. Despite the dry living conditions, many species have become adapted to this habitat including the Pennsylvania shale barrens evening primrose, cat's paw ragwort, fence lizards and many rare moth species. Shale barrens are only found from southern Pennsylvania through West Virginia to southern Virginia thereby leaving many of the species dependent on them listed as threatened and endangered.

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