

Plant Community Prediction Tool for Site Restoration

PA Aquatic Resource Restoration
Conference 2026

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naturalheritage.state.pa.us

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Pennsylvania Natural
Heritage Program



PA Natural Heritage Program

Gathers and provides information on the location and status of important plants, animals, natural communities and geologic features to inform environmental and conservation decisions

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
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Natural Heritage Network

- 90+ independent member programs
- Focus on at-risk species and ecosystems
- Standard data collection and management



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...best source for conservation science and species protection information

- avoid impacts
- minimize costs
- access to information
- education and outreach



PA Conservation Explorer

PNHP Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program

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Find address or place

Layers Make a Map Feature Search

- PGC Species of Special Concern
- PGC Species of Special Concern
- PFBC Threatened and Endangered Species
- PFBC Species of Special Concern
- DCNR Threatened and Endangered Species
- DCNR Threatened and Endangered Species
- DCNR Species of Special Concern
- DCNR Species of Special Concern
- Combined State Agency Species

Conservation Planning

- Abandoned Mine Locations
- Wilderness Trout Streams
- Class A Streams
- Streams Supporting Natural Trout Reproducti
- Chapter 93 Existing Use Streams
- Chapter 93 Designated Streams
- Priority Forest Patches
- Important Bird Areas
- Natural Heritage Area: Core Habitat
- Natural Heritage Areas: Supporting Landsc

Protected Lands

- State Wild and Natural Areas (DCNR)
- State Forests
- State Parks
- State Game Lands
- Federal Lands
- Other Lands

Reference Layers

- Counties
- HUC 8 Watersheds
- HUC 12 Watersheds
- Municipalities
- Quads

Draw/Edit

Edit Mode

Cancel Accept

Erbs Mill

200m 600ft Scale: 1 : 9,028 Latitude: 39.8655, Longitude: -76.3545

USDA FSA, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Microsoft, CNES/Airbus DS | Esri, HERE, DeLorme, NGA, USGS

Pennsylvania Natural
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Plant Communities in PA



Why Do We Care About Communities?

- 
- **“Mappable” units of the landscape**
 - **Provide a valuable framework for conservation**
 - **Conservation actions that protect communities also protect the rare species within them**
 - **Efficient, identifiable starting point for biological surveys**
 - **Repeating patterns in vegetation tell you something about the ecological conditions at a site**
 - **Allows us to communicate with others using a common terminology**

Pennsylvania Community Classification

Terrestrial & Palustrine Plant Communities of Pennsylvania
 2nd Edition

Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program

[Home](#) [Resources](#) [Projects](#) [News](#) [About PNHP](#) [Links](#) [PNDI ER Tool](#)

[Community Home](#) | [Palustrine Communities](#) | [Terrestrial Communities](#)

Terrestrial & Palustrine Plant Communities of Pennsylvania 2nd Ed.

Community Home

Past Efforts

Concepts

Using the Classification

References

Go to Palustrine Communities

Go to Terrestrial Communities

Plant communities are groups of plants sharing a common environment that interact with each other, animal populations, and the physical environment. As plant communities tend to co-occur on the landscape due to shared environmental requirements, they provide a valuable framework for organizing biological information creating mappable units for land management and conservation planning. Communities are often defined by dominant plant species and these plant associations provide useful habitat information for many animal species and provide an efficient starting point for biological surveys.

Terrestrial and Palustrine Plant Communities of Pennsylvania 2nd Edition represents the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program's best approximation of the upland and wetland plant community types of Pennsylvania and can be used to classify and describe patterns in vegetation seen across the landscape.

Click on the links above to go the descriptions of Terrestrial and Palustrine plant community types. In addition to information on species commonly associated with each community type, the links and tabs on this site contain useful identification keys, resources for identification and management and research information.

PNHP welcomes feedback from users of this classification, please send comments or data to the following address.

Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program
 DCNR Office of Conservation Science
 Post Office Box 8552, Harrisburg, PA 17205-8552

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Zimmerman, E., T. Davis, G. Podnieszinski, M. Furedi, J. McPherson, S. Seymour, B. Eichelberger, N. Dewar, J. Wagner, and J. Fike (editors). 2012. Terrestrial and Palustrine Plant Communities of Pennsylvania, 2nd Edition. Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Quick Links

- PLANT COMMUNITIES
- COUNTY INVENTORIES
- COUNTY INVENTORY INTERACTIVE MAP
- SPECIES LISTS
- iMapInvasives
- VERNAL POOLS
- AQUATIC COMMUNITIES
- CLIMATE CHANGE VULNERABILITY INDEX
- PNDI ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW TOOL

Terrestrial & Palustrine Plant Communities of Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program

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[Community Home](#) | [Palustrine Communities](#) | [Terrestrial Communities](#)

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Black Spruce – Tamarack Peatland Forest

Summary

Classification

Conservation

Range

References

Gallery

System: Palustrine
Subsystem: Forest
PA Ecological Group(s): Peatland Wetland

Global Rank: G3G5 rank interpretation
State Rank: S3

General Description

This describes a group of wetland forests found in glacially formed, ice-block depressions of small watersheds of the glaciated regions of Pennsylvania. These wetlands are dominated by a mixture of black spruce (*Picea mariana*) and tamarack (*Larix laricina*). The substrate is deep, poorly decomposed peat. There is generally very little groundwater or surface water enrichment in these systems except at the interface with uplands, leading to trees of small stature (< 40 ft.) in the inner portions of the wetland. Other trees that may occur include gray birch (*Betula populifolia*), red maple (*Acer rubrum*), Eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*), eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*), and quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*). Hemlock and white pine often occur as a taller fringe at the outer edge of the wetland where organic soils give way to mineral; at this interface there is more nutrient input from surface and groundwater from the surrounding uplands.

Identification

- Occur on saturated peat soils in basins at the upper ends of small watersheds
- High elevations in Pennsylvania (1,000-2,000 ft.).
- Dense, tall black spruce and tamarack, along with leatherleaf in the canopy gaps
- 100% cover of *Sphagnum* spp. are excellent indicators.

Shrub species include swamp azalea (*Rhododendron viscosum*), leatherleaf (*Chamaedaphne calyculata*), mountain holly (*Ilex mucronata*), winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), and highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*). The sedge, *Carex trisperma*, is often dominant along with a carpet of sphagnum mosses. Other species include star-flower (*Trientalis borealis*), cinquefoil (*Coxsandra cinerosa*), violet

Community Classification Key

FOREST GROUP

1. Relative cover of coniferous species for combined canopy and subcanopy is greater than 25%.
 2. Relative cover of coniferous species for combined canopy and subcanopy is between 25% and 75%. The deciduous portion of the canopy may be a combination of yellow birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*), red maple (*Acer rubrum*), sourgum (*Nyssa sylvatica*), black ash (*Fraxinus nigra*), and/or gray birch (*Betula populifolia*).
 3. Canopy cover for coniferous species is dominated by red spruce (*Picea rubens*). Other conifers, such as eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*), eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*), American larch/tamarack (*Larix laricina*), or balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*) may also be present at lower coverage.

Red Spruce – Mixed Hardwood Palustrine Forest
 3. Canopy cover for coniferous species is dominated by eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) and/or eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*). Other conifers, such as red spruce (*Picea rubens*), American larch/tamarack (*Larix laricina*), and balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*) may also be present at lower coverage.

Hemlock – Mixed Hardwood Palustrine Forest
2. Relative cover of coniferous species for combined canopy and subcanopy is greater than 75%.
 4. Relative cover for combined canopy and subcanopy is greater for eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) and/or eastern white pine (*Pinus strobes*) than spruce (*Picea* spp.) and American larch/tamarack (*Larix laricina*). Community typically has a hummock and pool micro-topography. Rosebay (*Rhododendron maximum*) typically forms a dense shrub layer.

Hemlock Palustrine Forest
 4. Relative cover for combined canopy and subcanopy is greater for either red spruce (*Picea rubens*), black spruce (*Picea mariana*), or American larch/tamarack (*Larix laricina*) than relative cover for eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) and/or eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*).
 5. Relative cover for combined canopy and subcanopy is dominated or co-dominated by red spruce (*Picea rubens*) and/or American larch/tamarack (*Larix laricina*). The substrate is typically either shallow organic soils or mineral soils with substantial surface accumulation of organic material (*histic epipedon*).

Red Spruce Palustrine Forest
 5. Relative cover for combined canopy and subcanopy is dominated by black spruce (*Picea mariana*) and/or American larch/tamarack (*Larix laricina*). The substrate consists of peat

Pennsylvania Community Prediction Tool for Site Restoration



Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program

- Home
- About PNHP -
- News and Events
- Resources -
- Tools -
- Conservation Explorer
- Search



Pennsylvania Community Prediction Tool for Site Restoration

The Pennsylvania Community Prediction Tool for Site Restoration (PCPT) was developed by the PA Natural Heritage Program to assist restoration practitioners in their efforts to establish native plant communities using species most likely to thrive at the site. The PCPT works by comparing site characteristics of your restoration site with ecological site characteristics of known natural vegetation communities sampled by PNHP and partners. Natural communities with similar characteristics are shown in the results and the user can generate a list of suggested species to plant based on common species found in these similar natural communities. Links to the PNHP's natural community fact sheets are also provided.

How the data in the tool represent your site largely depends on the size and complexity of the site. An assessment site can be any size, but they should be homogenous in terms of the vegetation and site variables. If you have a large heterogeneous site, you can run the tool multiple times to get customized planting lists for each homogenous sub-unit of the site. For example, a 20-acre site might have several different restoration sub-units based on differing slope, aspect, drainage qualities, or soil chemistry.

The PA Prediction Tool is only one piece of the puzzle. It will give you a list of native plants that comprise natural communities likely to thrive on your restoration site, and a little information about each of the species, including its tolerance of human disturbance, wetland status, rarity, and growth habit. It does not tell you which plants are available at local nurseries, easy to grow, resistant to herbivory, or affordable in terms of cost - all critical factors. It does not replace a site visit by an experienced restoration ecologist, who will be able to recognize potential natural regeneration of target species, and also evaluate nearby sources of invasive species. If you are collecting your own seed from local sources (a great strategy to conserve germplasm and local genetics), you will need to work with local nurseries to research seed collection and propagation methods.

[Run the Tool!](#)



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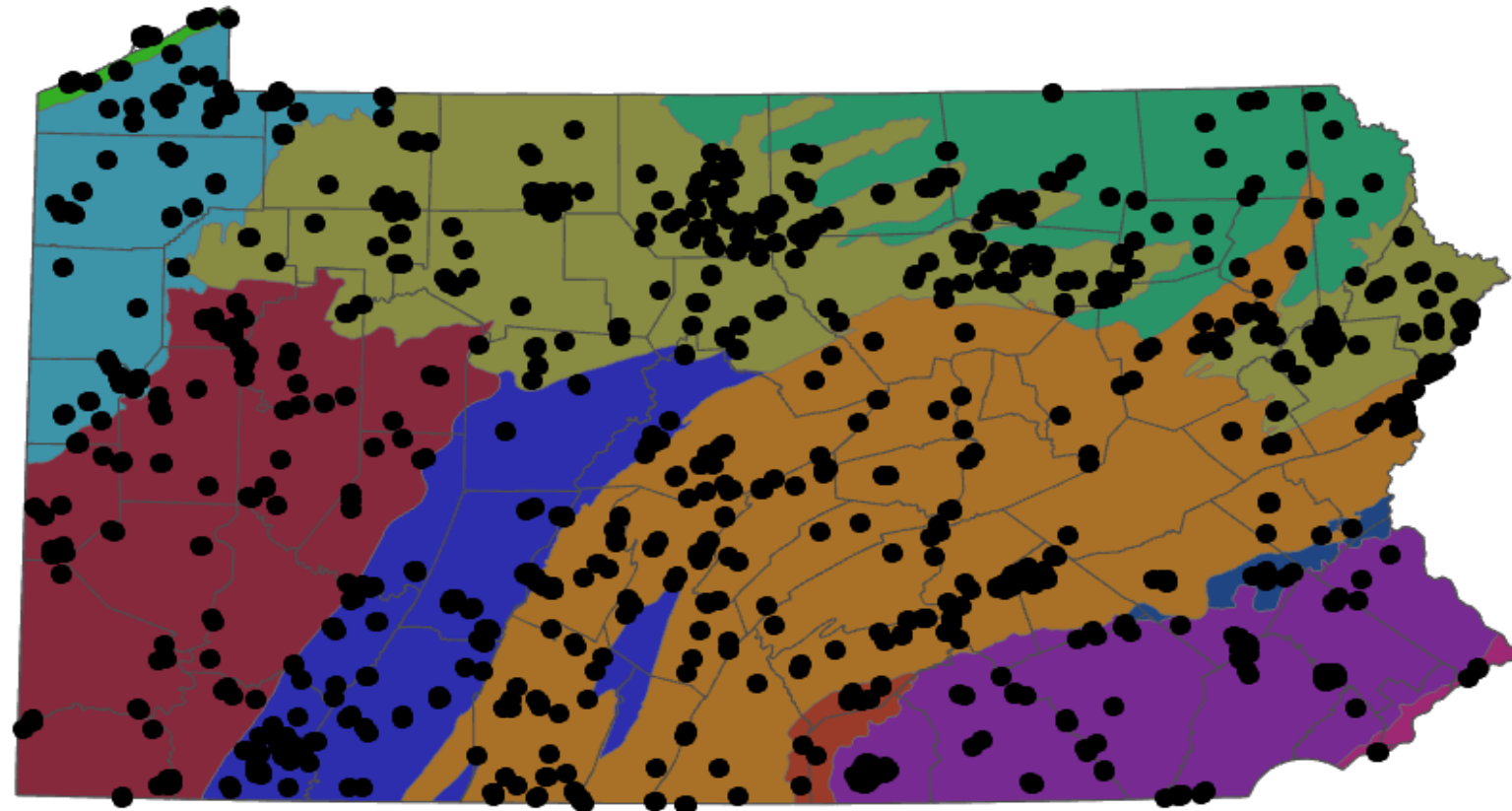
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Pennsylvania Community Prediction Tool for Site Restoration

- Plot Data



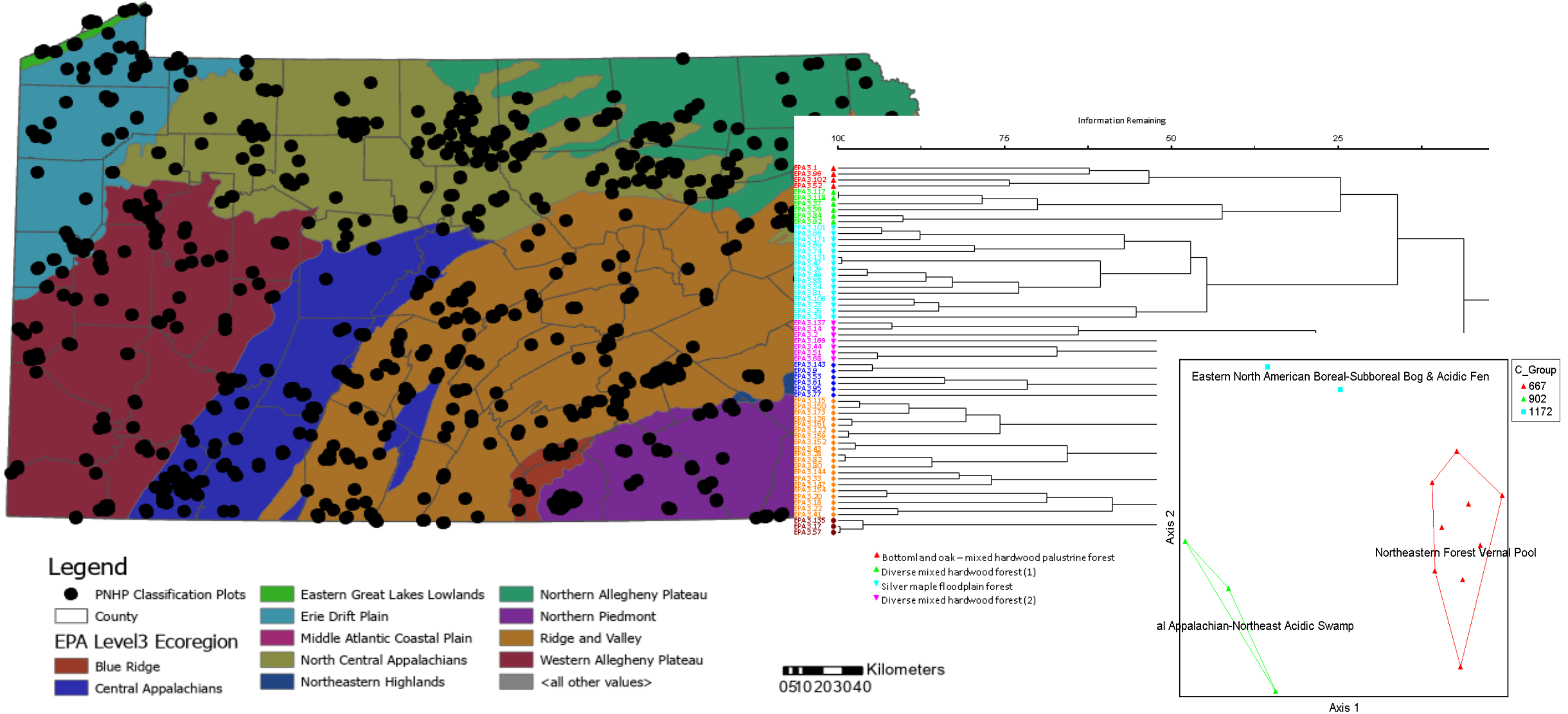
Legend

- | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| ● PNH Classification Plots | Eastern Great Lakes Lowlands | Northern Allegheny Plateau |
| □ County | Erie Drift Plain | Northern Piedmont |
| EPA Level3 Ecoregion | Middle Atlantic Coastal Plain | Ridge and Valley |
| Blue Ridge | North Central Appalachians | Western Allegheny Plateau |
| Central Appalachians | Northeastern Highlands | <all other values> |



0 100 Kilometers
0510203040

Pennsylvania Plots Database



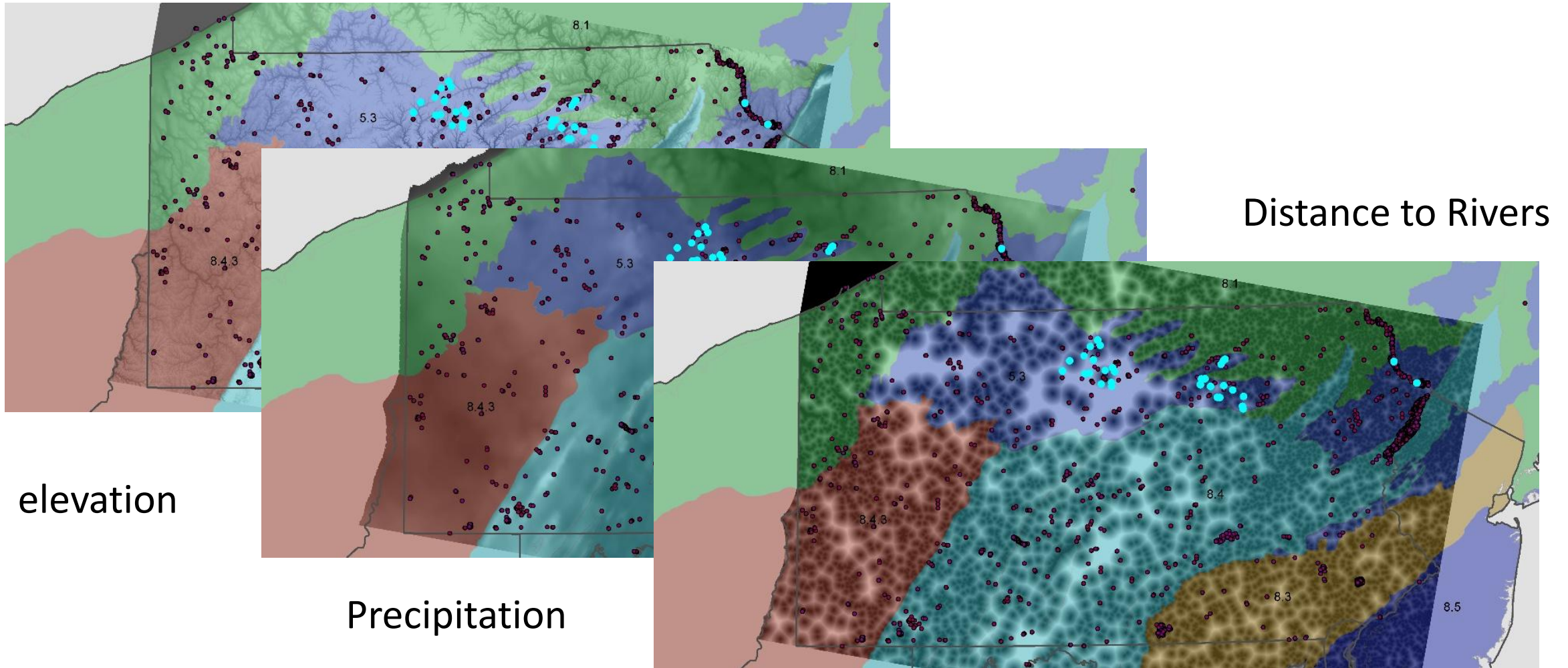
Legend

- PNHP Classification Plots
- County
- EPA Level3 Ecoregion
 - Blue Ridge
 - Central Appalachians
 - Eastern Great Lakes Lowlands
 - Erie Drift Plain
 - Middle Atlantic Coastal Plain
 - North Central Appalachians
 - Northeastern Highlands
 - Northern Allegheny Plateau
 - Northern Piedmont
 - Ridge and Valley
 - Western Allegheny Plateau
 - <all other values>

0510 203040 Kilometers

Pennsylvania Community Prediction Tool for Site Restoration

- Modeled ecological data



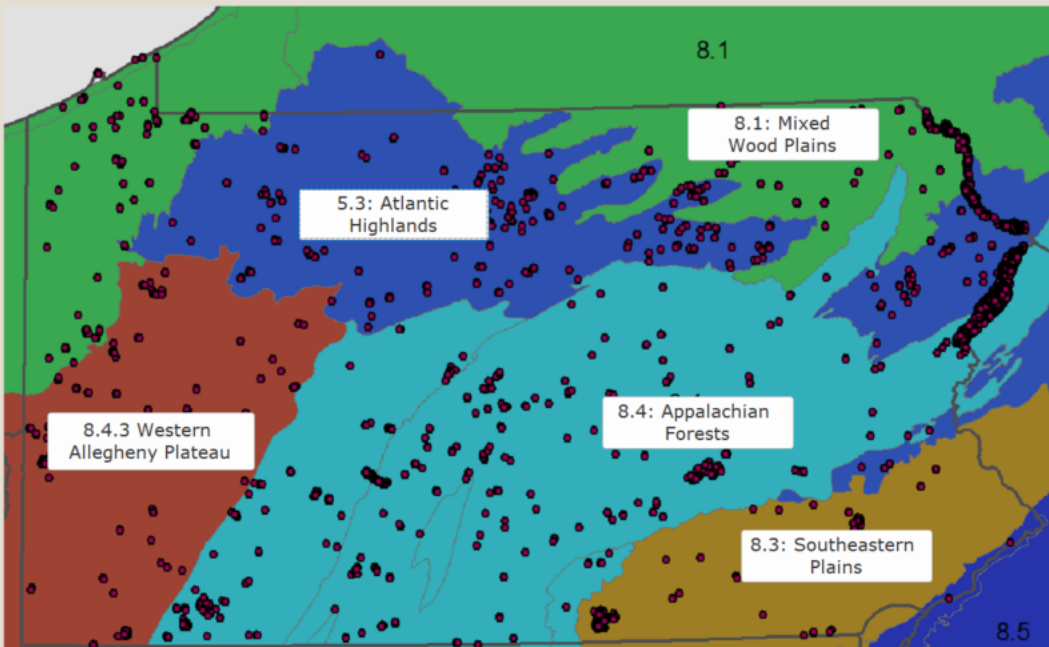
Pennsylvania Community Prediction Tool for Site Restoration

Select a Region - PA Target Prediction Tool, version 2.6

File Home Create External Data Database Tools Help Tell me what you want to do

Views Clipboard Sort & Filter Records Find Window Text Formatting

Pennsylvania Vegetation Prediction Tool: Select a Region



8.1

8.1: Mixed Wood Plains

5.3: Atlantic Highlands

8.4.3 Western Allegheny Plateau




8.4: Appalachian Forests

8.3: Southeastern Plains

8.5

Geotiffs folder:

- A. Link to EcoObs
- B. Export plot locations for R
- C. Open R, run scripts
- D. Import data from R
- E. Compile tool webpages



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Derived from the CVS Vegetation Prediction Tool, part of research efforts at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Form View

46 items

Pennsylvania Community Prediction Tool for Site Restoration

Vegetation Type



Eco Variables



Matrix of vegetation types and variables

ecoregion	vegtype	AnnMn Temp	beersx1000	crvplax100	crvprox100	crvslpx100	distcstwat	distestury	distinlwat	distlake	distlakriv	distocean	distpond
5.3	CEGL001474	0.491	0.500	0.582	0.729	0.278	0.146	0.146	0.030	0.106	0.005	0.162	0.160
5.3	CEGL006445	0.465	0.001	0.624	0.711	0.307	0.116	0.116	0.030	0.176	0.005	0.118	0.142
5.3	CEGL006575	0.689	0.144	0.459	0.825	0.150	0.056	0.056	0.000	0.095	0.072	0.000	0.402
5.3	CHWNPES000	0.545	0.500	0.595	0.714	0.293	0.095	0.095	0.017	0.116	0.003	0.107	0.192
5.3	CHWPGSS000	0.912	0.317	0.574	0.713	0.287	0.058	0.058	0.339	0.163	0.107	0.070	0.117
5.3	CHWPHFS000	0.490	0.500	0.624	0.701	0.315	0.146	0.146	0.000	0.107	0.000	0.162	0.164
5.3	CHWPWWS000	0.600	0.500	0.598	0.706	0.301	0.026	0.026	0.000	0.066	0.000	0.037	0.278
5.3	CPFBSMH000	0.657	0.439	0.588	0.716	0.288	0.008	0.008	0.037	0.165	0.007	0.021	0.147
5.3	CPFBSMM000	0.816	0.881	0.619	0.544	0.439	0.113	0.113	0.084	0.060	0.024	0.006	0.021
5.3	CPFCHMH000	0.379	0.500	0.608	0.711	0.301	0.996	0.996	0.089	0.121	0.241	1.000	0.261
5.3	CPSBASP000	0.291	0.500	0.591	0.713	0.293	0.274	0.274	0.140	0.062	0.080	0.140	0.080
5.3	CPSBBBS000	0.229	0.500	0.585	0.722	0.282	0.502	0.502	0.077	0.069	0.133	0.335	0.280

Pennsylvania Community Prediction Tool for Site Restoration



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Home

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Resources -

Tools -

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[Run the Tool!](#)

<https://www.naturalheritage.state.pa.us/RestorationTool.aspx>

Pennsylvania Community Prediction Tool for Site Restoration

maps.dcnr.beta.pa.gov/bof/pacrtt/

PNHP Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program

Find address or place

Plant Restoration Tool

Instructions

Click on the Select Target button

Select Target

Click on your area of interest

Click on the report link below

Report Link:

[Tool Help](#)

32 items

<https://www.naturalheritage.state.pa.us/RestorationTool.aspx>

Pennsylvania Community Prediction Tool for Site Restoration

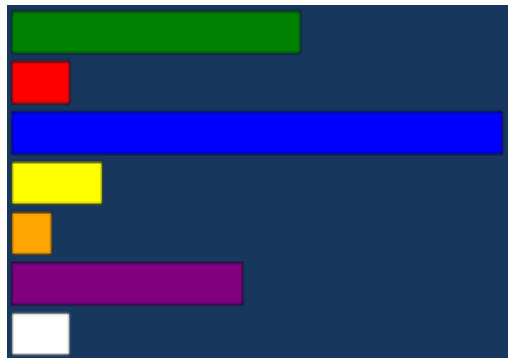
Compare the variables of your site to the variables of vegetation type

ecoregion	vegtype	AnnMn Temp	beersx1000	crvplax100	crvprox100	crvslpx100	distcstwat	distestury	distinlwat	distlake	distlakriv	distocean	distpond
5.3	User site 1	0.371	0.312	0.821	0.324	0.671	0.813	0.001	0.006	0.141	0.005	0.062	0.341
ecoregion	vegtype	AnnMn Temp	beersx1000	crvplax100	crvprox100	crvslpx100	distcstwat	distestury	distinlwat	distlake	distlakriv	distocean	distpond
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5.3	CHWPGSS000	0.912	0.317	0.574	0.713	0.287	0.058	0.058	0.339	0.163	0.107	0.070	0.117
5.3	CHWPHFS000	0.490	0.500	0.624	0.701	0.315	0.146	0.146	0.000	0.107	0.000	0.162	0.164
5.3	CHWPWWS000	0.600	0.500	0.598	0.706	0.301	0.026	0.026	0.000	0.066	0.000	0.037	0.278
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5.3	CPSBBBS000	0.229	0.500	0.585	0.722	0.282	0.502	0.502	0.077	0.069	0.133	0.335	0.280

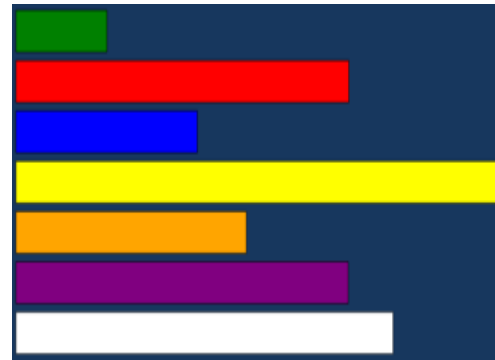
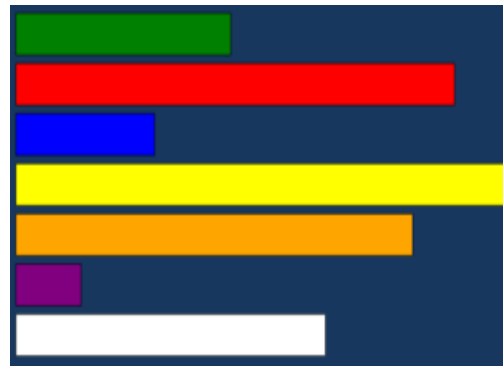
Pennsylvania Community Prediction Tool for Site Restoration

Calculating similarity (Bray-Curtis) between your site, then matching sets of ecological variables of known plant communities

0.41

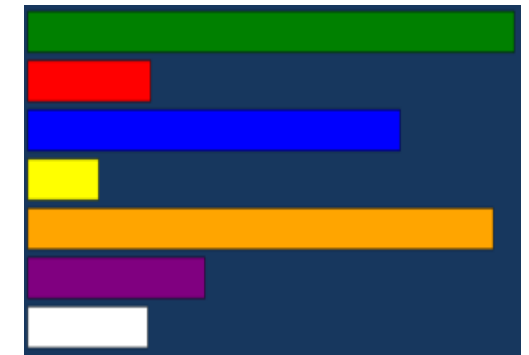


and targets:



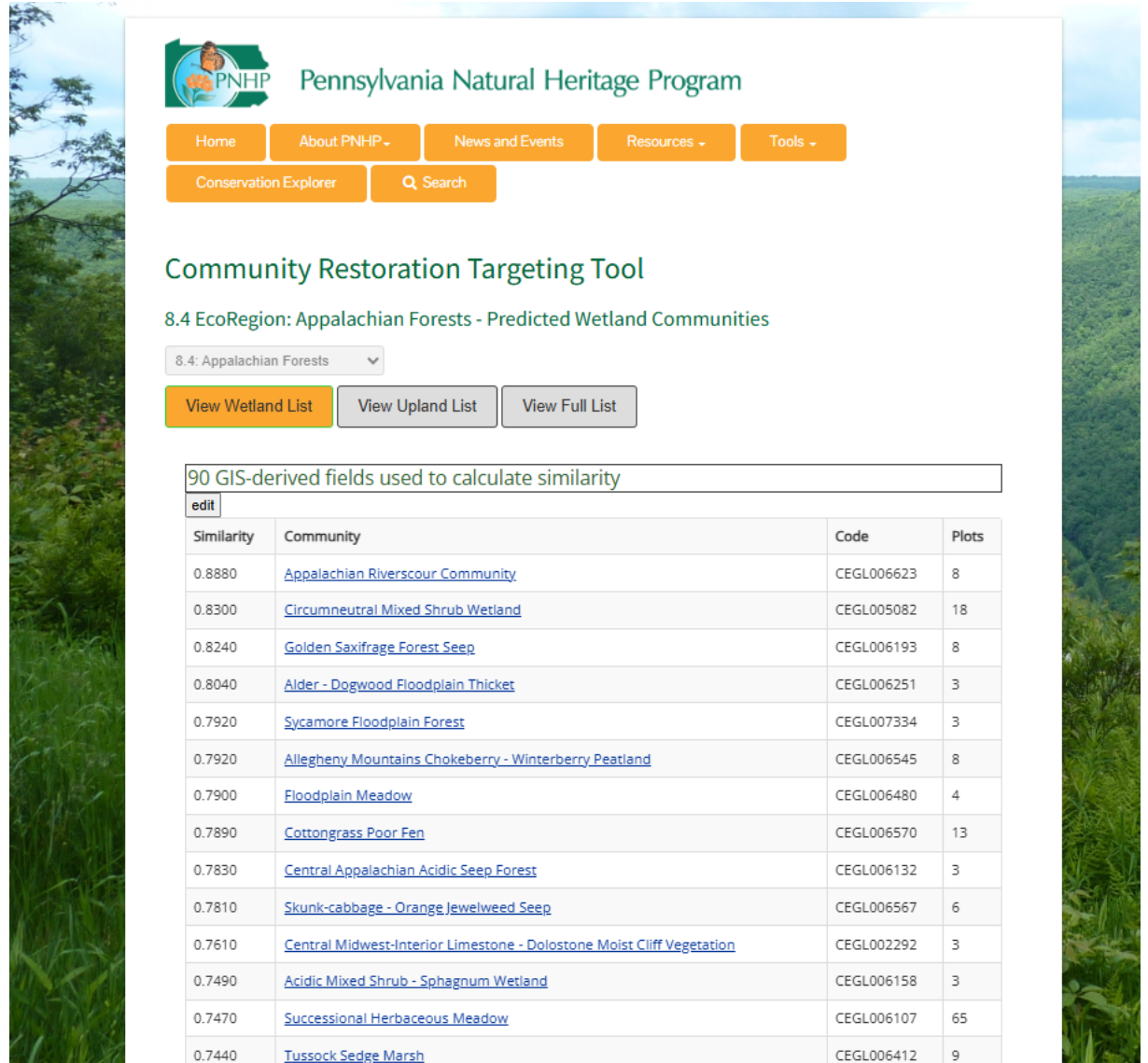
0.75

0.50



Pennsylvania Community Prediction Tool for Site Restoration

The communities that are most similar to the restoration site are identified



The screenshot displays the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program (PNHP) website. At the top, the PNHP logo is visible alongside the text "Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program". Below this, there is a navigation menu with buttons for "Home", "About PNHP", "News and Events", "Resources", and "Tools". A search bar is also present, labeled "Conservation Explorer" and "Search".

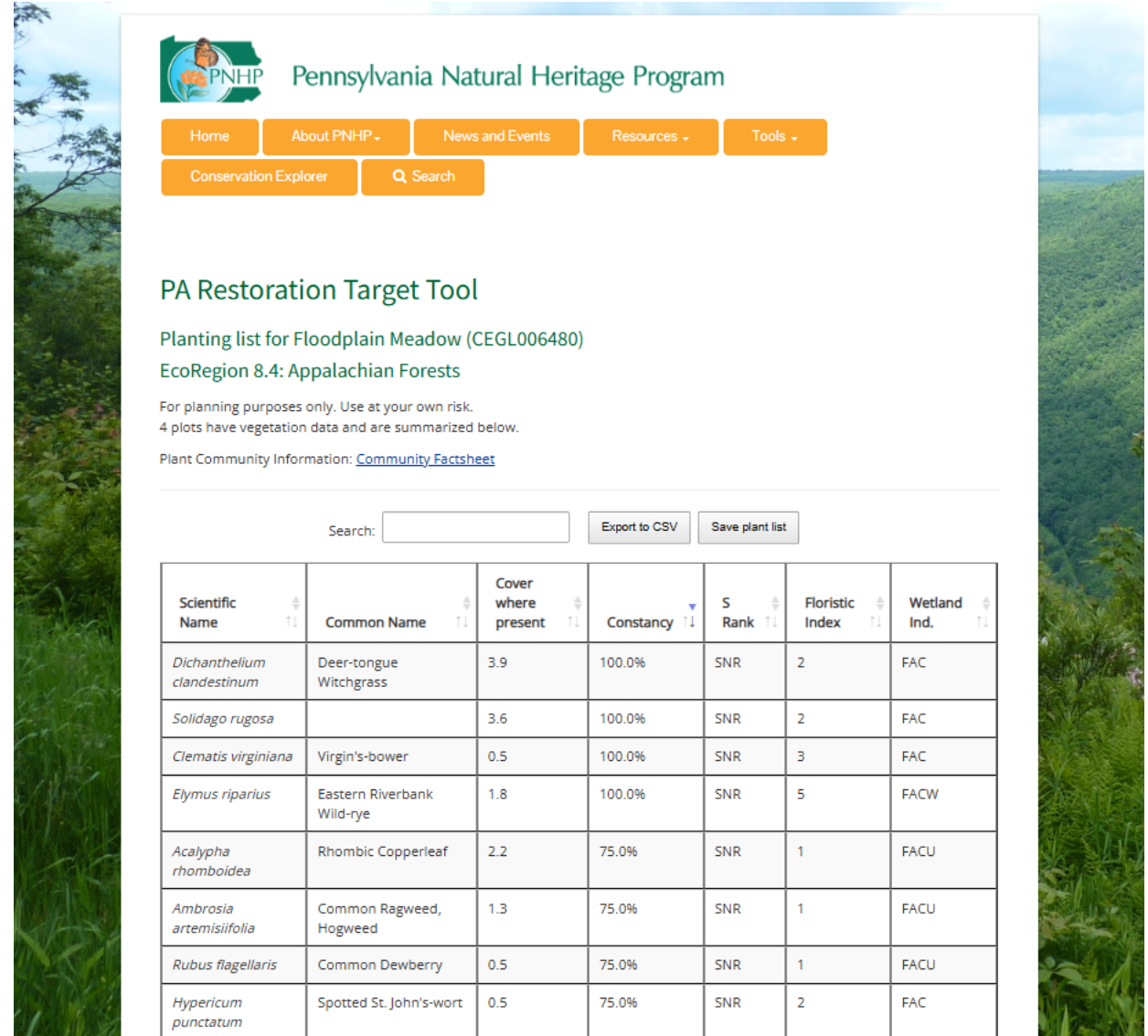
The main content area is titled "Community Restoration Targeting Tool" and shows the selection of "8.4 EcoRegion: Appalachian Forests - Predicted Wetland Communities". A dropdown menu is set to "8.4: Appalachian Forests". Below this, there are three buttons: "View Wetland List" (highlighted in orange), "View Upland List", and "View Full List".

A table titled "90 GIS-derived fields used to calculate similarity" is displayed, with an "edit" link. The table has four columns: "Similarity", "Community", "Code", and "Plots". The data is as follows:

Similarity	Community	Code	Plots
0.8880	Appalachian Riverscour Community	CEGL006623	8
0.8300	Circumneutral Mixed Shrub Wetland	CEGL005082	18
0.8240	Golden Saxifrage Forest Seep	CEGL006193	8
0.8040	Alder - Dogwood Floodplain Thicket	CEGL006251	3
0.7920	Sycamore Floodplain Forest	CEGL007334	3
0.7920	Allegheny Mountains Chokeberry - Winterberry Peatland	CEGL006545	8
0.7900	Floodplain Meadow	CEGL006480	4
0.7890	Cottongrass Poor Fen	CEGL006570	13
0.7830	Central Appalachian Acidic Seep Forest	CEGL006132	3
0.7810	Skunk-cabbage - Orange Jewelweed Seep	CEGL006567	6
0.7610	Central Midwest-Interior Limestone - Dolostone Moist Cliff Vegetation	CEGL002292	3
0.7490	Acidic Mixed Shrub - Sphagnum Wetland	CEGL006158	3
0.7470	Successional Herbaceous Meadow	CEGL006107	65
0.7440	Tussock Sedge Marsh	CEGL006412	9
0.7380	Sugar Maple - Mixed Hardwood Floodplain Forest	CEGL006459	13

Pennsylvania Community Prediction Tool for Site Restoration

- Obtain a species list for the selected community
- Export the planting list with the relevant stats for each species
- Export multiple lists and combine in Excel



The screenshot displays the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program (PNHP) website. At the top, there is a navigation menu with buttons for Home, About PNHP, News and Events, Resources, and Tools. Below this is a search bar and a Conservation Explorer button. The main content area is titled "PA Restoration Target Tool" and shows a planting list for Floodplain Meadow (CEGL006480) in EcoRegion 8.4: Appalachian Forests. A disclaimer states: "For planning purposes only. Use at your own risk. 4 plots have vegetation data and are summarized below." Below the disclaimer is a link to "Plant Community Information: [Community Factsheet](#)".

At the bottom of the page, there is a search bar and two buttons: "Export to CSV" and "Save plant list". Below these is a table with the following data:

Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover where present	Constancy	S Rank	Floristic Index	Wetland Ind.
<i>Dichanthelium clandestinum</i>	Deer-tongue Witchgrass	3.9	100.0%	SNR	2	FAC
<i>Solidago rugosa</i>		3.6	100.0%	SNR	2	FAC
<i>Clematis virginiana</i>	Virgin's-bower	0.5	100.0%	SNR	3	FAC
<i>Elymus riparius</i>	Eastern Riverbank Wild-rye	1.8	100.0%	SNR	5	FACW
<i>Acalypha rhomboidea</i>	Rhombic Copperleaf	2.2	75.0%	SNR	1	FACU
<i>Ambrosia artemisiifolia</i>	Common Ragweed, Hogweed	1.3	75.0%	SNR	1	FACU
<i>Rubus flagellaris</i>	Common Dewberry	0.5	75.0%	SNR	1	FACU
<i>Hypericum punctatum</i>	Spotted St. John's-wort	0.5	75.0%	SNR	2	FAC
<i>Verbesina alternifolia</i>	Common Wingstem	1	75.0%	SNR	2	FAC

Pennsylvania Community Prediction Tool for Site Restoration

Evaluation Site



Eco Variables



ecoregion	vegtype	AnnMn Temp	beersx1000	crvplax100	Crvprox100	Crvslpx100	distcstwat	distestury	distinlwat	distlake	distlakriv	distocean	distpond
5.3	User site 1	0.371	0.312	0.821	0.324	0.671	0.813	0.001	0.006	0.141	0.005	0.062	0.341



restoration site



target reference communities

Pennsylvania Community Prediction Tool for Site Restoration

maps.dcnr.beta.pa.gov/bof/pacrtt/

Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program

Find address or place

Plant Restoration Tool

Instructions

Click on the Select Target button

Select Target

Click on your area of interest

Click on the report link below

Report Link:

[Tool Help](#)

32 items

<https://www.naturalheritage.state.pa.us/RestorationTool.aspx>

Thanks!

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Plant Community Classification

Plant Communities of Pennsylvania

Plant communities are groups of plants sharing a common environment that interact with each other, animal populations, and the physical environment. As plant communities tend to co-occur on the landscape due to shared environmental requirements, they provide a valuable framework for organizing biological information creating map-able units for land management and conservation planning. Communities are often defined by dominant plant species and these plant associations provide useful habitat information for many animal species and provide an efficient starting point for biological surveys.

Using the Classification



Palustrine Communities



Terrestrial Communities



- Original tool developed at University of North Carolina by Michael Lee, Liz Matthews, and Bob Peet (2011-2012)
- Data from the Carolina Vegetation Survey
- Funded by NC Ecosystem Enhancement Program (now Department of Mitigation Services)
- West Virginia Division of Natural Resources funded West Virginia version (2013)
- EPEA Wetland Program Development Grants/PA Department of Environmental Protection funded Pennsylvania version with NatureServe (2018-)
- Data from PNHP obtained through projects funded by PA DCNR, PA DEP, PA Game Commission, National Parks Service, USFWS.
- Environmental data from Species Modeling Working Group (NatureServe)