

## Moosic Mountain Barrens

This site is one of the top priorities for conservation in the county. It is an extensive mosaic of barrens communities. The barrens are primarily restricted to the highest most exposed portions of the ridge and are surrounded by slopes and drainages with mixed hardwood forest. The site includes both **Ridgetop dwarf-tree forest** and **Heath barrens Natural Communities** along with unassessed amounts of **Northern Appalachian Acidic Rocky Summit Natural Community**. The heath barrens are a newly discovered natural community for Pennsylvania.

The Nature Conservancy of Pennsylvania has recently purchased 1,200 acres of land on Moosic Mountain. This parcel is part of an approximately 6,000-acre ridgetop barrens complex, one of the largest and most diverse in the northeastern United States. They are characterized by a dominance of low growing ericaceous species which include lowbush blueberry, huckleberry, sheep laurel, black chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*), and teaberry (*Gaultheria procumbens*).

Herbaceous species such as Pennsylvania sedge (*Carex pennsylvanica*), poverty grass, and Canada mayflower (*Maianthemum canadense*) are infrequent associates found among the heath shrubs. Large expanses of this ankle to knee-high vegetation stretch along the ridgetop creating sweeping views of the ridge and the valleys below. It is uncertain what conditions cause the occurrence and persistence of this community type at this location. Fire and microclimate are important factors in helping to maintain this community type at other locations in the northeastern United States. Some portions of the ridge at Moosic Mountain have been used historically for blueberry harvest which included cutting and burning. The influence of these historical activities on the maintenance of the heath barrens is uncertain.

The Ridgetop Dwarf-Tree Forest Natural Community consists primarily of scrub-oak barrens, and in some areas, Pitch pine-Scrub oak barrens. On some stretches of the ridge it occurs adjacent to the heath barrens, elsewhere it completely covers the width of the ridge. Though pitch-pine, black gum, chestnut oak, and sassafras are infrequently scattered throughout, scrub oak is the dominant canopy species in the dwarf tree forest. Common birds observed in the barrens included common yellowthroat, prairie warbler, chestnut-sided warbler, rufous-sided towhee, and chipping sparrow.

From limited surveys it was discovered that this site supports several moth species of concern, including **sallow moth** (*Chaetagnalea cerata*), **barrens chaetagnalea** (*C. tremula*), **pointed saw** (*Epignalea apiata*), **broad saw** (*Xylotype capax*), **footpath saw** (*Metaxagnalea semitaria*) and **pink saw** (*Psectragalea carnosa*). The site has the potential to support a number of other rare plant and animal species.