

Report Highlights

The summit of Mount Everett is covered by approximately 20 acres of dwarfed pitch pines and associated plants.

Compared with the other southern Taconic mountains, Mount Everett has the densest coverage of dwarf pitch pines over the greatest area. Only Race Mountain and to a lesser extent Bear Mountain approximate the pervasive dwarfing, density, and acreage of the pitch-pine community on Mount Everett.

In Massachusetts, dwarf pitch pine communities represent less than one thousandth of one percent of the state's land area.

In New England, similar mountaintop dwarf pitch-pine communities are found only on Mount Cardigan in New Hampshire and Mount Desert Island in Maine. Smaller examples may exist but collectively their contribution is minuscule.

In the northeast, the Shawangunk mountains in New York are the only other locations typically cited for extensive summit dwarf pitch-pine communities.

The 360-degree views from Mount Everett's summit enabled by low vegetation have been described by writers since 1781. A Swedish naturalist noted the unusual barren summits of the South Taconics in 1749.

Since the Mount Everett State Reservation was created by the state legislature in 1908, there have been no reports of fire or clearing that would account for the low vegetation on the summit. Research hasn't been completed on earlier records.

There is evidence of early Native Americans on and around Mount Everett, but so far no references have been found to Native American fire or other vegetation-clearing practices there.

Infrequent fires, less than one in a century, and rugged weather conditions have likely helped create and maintain the extreme dwarfism of the pitch pines for more than 6,000 years.

If palynological research confirms this hypothesis, Mount Everett's pitch pine community would be of key historic importance -- a remnant from the middle Holocene era.

Initial cores of pitch pines on the summit reveal maximum ages of up to 170 years.

The Mount Everett pitch-pine community may be an example of an ancient, stable forest ecosystem composed of relatively young trees.

64 lichen species were collected from Mount Everett's summit over a 12-hour period this fall. Of those, three are considered noteworthy: One is an extremely rare lichen, previously known only from southeast Arizona and Costa Rica. One is apparently new to science. It was found on pitch pine bark.

An expert in Germany will be working this year to describe it, using the Mount Everett sample. The third is a tiny lichen that grows on weathered pinecones still attached to the tree. It has rarely been collected but is not uncommon.

Two rare moth species have been discovered on the summit: One is listed as a Threatened species and another listed as a Special Concern species by the state's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program. Three uncommon moth species were also identified, as well as eight species that are rare below southwestern Massachusetts.

Eastern timber rattlesnakes have been observed on Mount Everett, and a rattlesnake den is believed to be located there. Eastern timber rattlesnakes are listed as an Endangered species by the state.

These data and observations are only preliminary because they are based on field trips conducted from September to November of 1999 and so don't take into account the growing season of Spring and Summer.

Nonetheless, the report's contributors believe that the rarity of Mount Everett's dwarf pitch-pine community and the potential for finding other unusual and perhaps unique characteristics with more research mean that the summit should be protected as an undeveloped nature preserve.

The report recommends that more in-depth scientific studies should be conducted on the summit and nothing should be done there that might affect this rare ecosystem.