

# Ecological Assessment of Mount Everett

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The summit of Mount Everett supports a unique community typified by highly dwarfed pitch pine, *Pinus rigida*. Other than Mount Everett and the nearby summits of Race and Bear Mountains, the only other places I have witnessed pitch pine dwarfing like this is on New Hampshire's Mount Cardigan and a few of the summits on Mount Desert Island, Maine. Summit pitch pine communities are not common in New England and ones showing this level of dwarfing are truly unusual.

Within New England this is the second highest stand of pitch pine that I am aware of (2,600 feet) with Mount Cardigan's stand being a couple of hundred feet higher. Of all these dwarfed summit communities, Mount Everett has the highest species richness with respect to woody vegetation. Mount Everett's pitch pines show little or no serotiny in their cones while nearby populations on Race and Bear Mountains have high levels of serotiny, suggesting that Mount Everett's pitch pines are genetically isolated from those to the south on this ridge system.

Infrequent fires (less than one a century) and winter exposure are key factors in the maintenance of this community. Fires reduce competition from red oak, and winter winds and associated ice blasting stunt all species of trees, allowing pitch pines to maintain a prominent presence. It is likely that these conditions have helped maintain this summit community since prior to the hypsithermal more than 6,000 years ago. If this is in fact substantiated by palynological research, Mount Everett's pitch-pine community would be of key historic importance - a remnant from the middle Holocene.