

Habitat protection near Casco Bay

Gulf of Maine Coastal Program



Located where New England's northern rockbound coastline meets southern beaches and salt marshes, Casco Bay is surrounded by 15 Maine towns. Though still rich in natural values, Casco Bay and its surrounding watershed are subject to severe threats of increasing development. A Brookings Institute report released in 2001 documented that "development in metropolitan Portland is consuming more acreage per person than in any other city in the Northeast, and at a rate that is among the most wasteful in the nation."

Gulf of Maine Coastal Program has enjoyed a long partnership with the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership, which identifies "habitat protection" as one of its key priority action items. Gulf of Maine Coastal Program has served on the Executive Committee and on multiple subcommittees for more than a dozen years, successfully encouraging the Estuary Partnership to prioritize habitat protection needs in the watershed.

In the mid-1990s, using information provided by federal, state and local partners, and with matching funds from the Estuary Partnership, Gulf of Maine Coastal Program biologists identified and ranked important wildlife areas for colonial waterbirds, seabirds, wading birds, diadromous and freshwater fish, eelgrass, cordgrass, marine worms, shellfish and endangered/threatened species in the Casco Bay watershed. That initial effort was followed by a comprehensive GIS analysis identifying high value habitat for 91 priority migratory birds, fish and threatened, rare or endangered species throughout the Gulf of Maine watershed.

With funding from the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership and with substantial technical support from the Gulf of Maine Coastal Program, local land trusts, town planners and a consultant developed a comprehensive inventory and map identifying protected conservation lands in the 15 towns. Gulf of Maine Coastal Program played a key role in developing the comprehensive inventory and soliciting information from local land trusts. The town-by-town database has been provided to appropriate land trusts and can be used to identify existing conservation lands within a town, identify gaps in conservation ownership and track changes in permanently protected land in the watershed over time. The maps can also link on-the-ground conservation work between neighboring towns.

As part of the broader Maine Coast Protection Initiative designed to "increase the pace and quality of conservation in coastal Maine," four GIS Service Centers have been established in coastal Maine to assist local land trusts. Gulf of Maine Coastal Program is the "GIS Service Center" for the towns surrounding Casco Bay. In carrying out our new role, we have updated conservation lands data, prepared packages of key biological data (i.e. wetlands, habitat values, rivers, streams, landcover) and provided training and on-going support to land trusts for their use in strategic habitat conservation activities.

At the suggestion of Gulf of Maine Coastal Program, the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership established a Habitat Protection Fund to help catalyze and support habitat protection initiatives in the watershed. The fund is jointly administered by Gulf of Maine Coastal Program, Maine Coast Heritage Trust and Casco Bay Estuary Partnership. Since its inception in 1997, the Fund has provided nearly \$350,000 to help permanently protect more than 3,700 acres of high value habitat at 21 sites throughout the watershed.

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Habitat protection projects funded in part by the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership Habitat Protection Fund

Project name	Acreage	Casco Bay funds	Land Trust partner
Holt Bog	113	\$15,000	Loon Echo Land Trust
Mill Creek & Falmouth Nature Preserve connector	14	\$10,000	Falmouth Conservation Trust
Trufant-Sumerton Long Reach Forest	90	\$5,000	Harswell Heritage Land Trust
Overset Island, Long Island	–	\$400 for appraisal	Oceanside Conservation Trust
Presumpscot River Preserve	60	\$35,000	Portland Trails
Flag Island	26	\$8,000	ME Dept. of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
Florida Lakes	167	\$5,000	Freeport Conservation Trust
Skolfield Farm	74	\$35,000	Harswell Heritage Land Trust
Blackstrap Road	257	\$10,000	Falmouth Conservation Trust
Robinson Woods	81	\$25,340	Cape Elizabeth Land Trust
Sebago Headwaters Preserve	1,566	\$50,000	Loon Echo Land Trust
Pettingill Island	9	\$4,300	Freeport Conservation Trust
Meerve Farm	434	\$26,000	Scarborough Land Conservation Trust
Curit property, Chebeague Island	6	\$1,000	Cumberland Mainland & Islands Trust
Packard property	28	\$15,000	Harswell Heritage Land Trust
Quarry Woods and Wetlands	32	\$21,000	Freeport Conservation Trust
Bradbury Mount/Pinelands Corridor	348	\$20,000	Pownal Land Trust
Hawkes property, Chandler Bk.	60	\$8,000	Friends of the Royal River
Crystal Spring Farm	162	\$20,000	Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust
Pondicherry Park	40	\$15,000	Loon Echo Land Trust
Brickyard Farm	14	\$20,000	Portland Trails
Hamilton Sanctuary	153	\$25,000	Maine Audubon Society

