

INTRODUCTION



CASCO BAY PLAN

The Casco Bay Estuary Project is a cooperative effort to protect and prevent the pollution of Casco Bay by involving concerned citizens and local, state, and federal governments.

Developed through a collaborative process involving hundreds of individuals and dozens of organizations and government agencies, this Plan represents the commitment of citizens, industries, and communities to protect Casco Bay. It marks the culmination of five years' effort involving scientific studies, public feedback, local government input, and countless meetings and discussions.

We invite you to get involved and help us renew Casco Bay.

INTRODUCTION

Casco Bay lies at the heart of Maine's most populated area. The health of its waters, wetlands, and wildlife depend — in large part — on the activities of the quarter-million residents who live in its watershed.

Less than 30 years ago, portions of Casco Bay were off-limits to recreation, fishing, and clamming. The lower Presumpscot River was devoid of fish, and paint peeling off nearby homes was attributed to the strong odor of chemicals emanating from the river. Back Cove and the Fore River were “open sewers” and any human contact was dangerous to one's health.

With the passage of clean water laws and the cooperation of business, industry, and municipalities, the former obvious threats to Casco Bay, such as sewage, industrial waste, and oil, have been greatly reduced. Portland area residents can swim and boat off East End Beach and sailboard in Back Cove. Great blue heron, snowy egrets, and osprey are seen along the Presumpscot River. *The policies and actions of the past 20 years have paid off in tangible ways.*

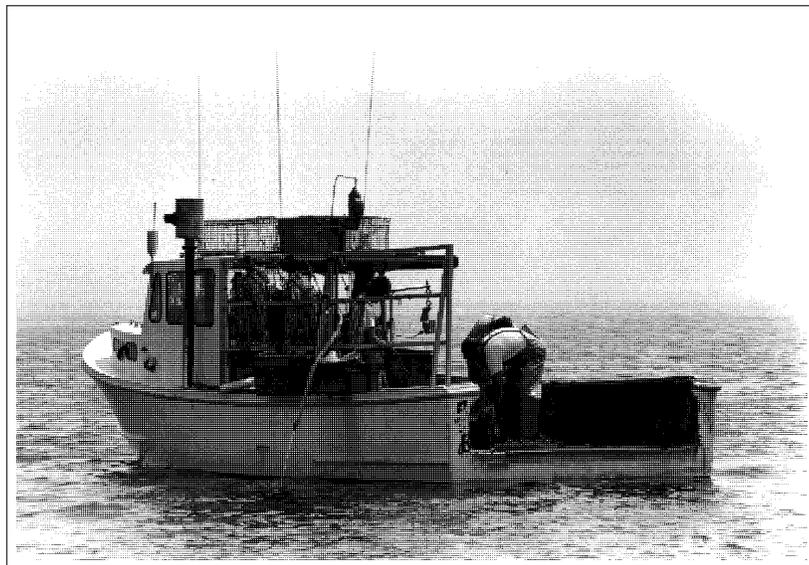


photo by Christopher Ayres

A watershed encompasses the land area that drains into a particular stream, river, or bay. Watersheds can vary in size from a few acres (for a minor stream) to thousands of square miles.

- The watershed of Casco Bay encompasses 985 square miles of land, which includes 41 municipalities. It stretches from the coast at Cape Elizabeth east to Cape Small in Phippsburg, and northwest to Bethel, in the western mountains of Maine.
- The shoreline of Casco Bay covers 578 miles (including 785 islands, islets, and exposed ledges), and the water surface encompasses nearly 200 square miles.
- Twelve significant lake and river systems feed the bay, including Sebago Lake and four major tributaries: the Presumpscot, Royal, Stroudwater, and Fore rivers.
- While the Casco Bay watershed represents only 3 percent of Maine’s total land mass, it holds nearly 25 percent of the state’s population. Residents depend on the bay and its watershed for multiple (and sometimes conflicting) needs — drinking water, recreation, food, transportation, industry, and waste disposal.

Recognition of the interconnections within each watershed has led to a new approach in environmental management and land use planning. Rather than focusing on local towns or individual species, efforts are now made to sustain the health of the whole ecosystem. **This Plan incorporates a “watershed” view in its recommendations for protecting the Casco Bay estuary.**

While the environmental health of the bay has improved, specific problems relating to conflicting human use, pollution, and habitat loss remain, which prompted public concern about the overall health of the bay in the 1980s. Elevated levels of toxic contaminants have been found in sediments, mussels, and lobster tomalley taken from urban portions of the bay. Through selection of Casco Bay as an estuary of national significance by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Maine received federal support under Section 320 of the Water Quality Act of 1987 to study the state of the bay, assess the impact of human activities, and determine the actions needed to improve its health.

Developed through a collaborative process involving hundreds of individuals and dozens of organizations and government agencies, this *Plan* represents the commitment of citizens, industries, and communities to protect Casco Bay. It marks the culmination of five years’ effort involving scientific studies, public feedback, local government input, and countless meetings and discussions. *Through this effort, a view of a generally healthy bay is emerging.*

To understand Casco Bay and prevent further pollution/degradation, this *Plan* focuses on five key issues of importance to the health of the bay. These issues, identified through an inclusive public process, are stormwater management, clam flats and swimming areas, habitat protection, toxic pollution, and stewardship of the bay.

The stress imposed on Casco Bay by our activities is directly attributable to the demands of population growth and suburbanization, which is expected to continue. Roughly 60 percent of the pollution comes from diverse sources, such as oil and chemicals from roadway runoff, pesticides applied by homeowners, and fertilizers from farm fields. These “nonpoint” sources of

pollution are difficult to control and are not easily regulated. Reduction of nonpoint-source pollution is therefore a major focus of this *Plan*.

In the following chapters, each of the five priority issues is described in detail. Although there are many issues important to Casco Bay, these five were selected as the most important issues that were not being addressed comprehensively by others. Chapters 2 through 6 help define the five priority issues and their relationship to the health of Casco Bay.



photo by Christopher Ayres

Beyond a review of the problem areas is the need to agree collectively on ways to move forward and responsibly protect the bay into the future. Chapter 7, *Developing New Solutions*, is the heart of this *Plan*. Actions to protect the bay are presented in four areas: public education, technical assistance, regulation and enforcement, and planning and assessment. The monitoring plan (Chapter 8) describes how progress implementing the *Plan* will be measured. Together these two chapters set forth a map to guide protection efforts during the next five years and establish a program for protection into the future.

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The structure and leadership needed to realize this vision are described in Chapter 9, which outlines an implementation and finance plan. How to implement the *Plan* has been the subject of numerous discussions and has been probably the most important subject to be resolved in order to ensure that the actions supported by the community are completed.

Chapter 10 defines the process that will be used to ensure that federal programs are coordinated and that federally funded activities that occur in the watershed support our effort.

Finally, Chapter 11 provides an overview of how the *Plan* was developed.