

How Much Land Is Protected in the Lower 15 Towns In the Casco Bay Watershed?

Answer: Protected land has increased by nearly 50% since 1997.

Why Is it Important to Protect Critical Habitat in Casco Bay?

The Casco Bay watershed supports a diverse assemblage of migratory birds, fish and other wildlife, but habitat is threatened with residential and commercial development throughout the watershed. A Brookings Institution report released in July, 2001 documented that Greater Portland is consuming more acreage per person than any other city in the Northeast. Between 1982 and 1997, the Greater Portland population increased 17%, but farmland and forestland conversion to urban uses increased by 108%. Only eight other metropolitan areas in the nation sprawled at a faster rate. As sprawl escalates, the natural resource values of the Casco Bay watershed decline.

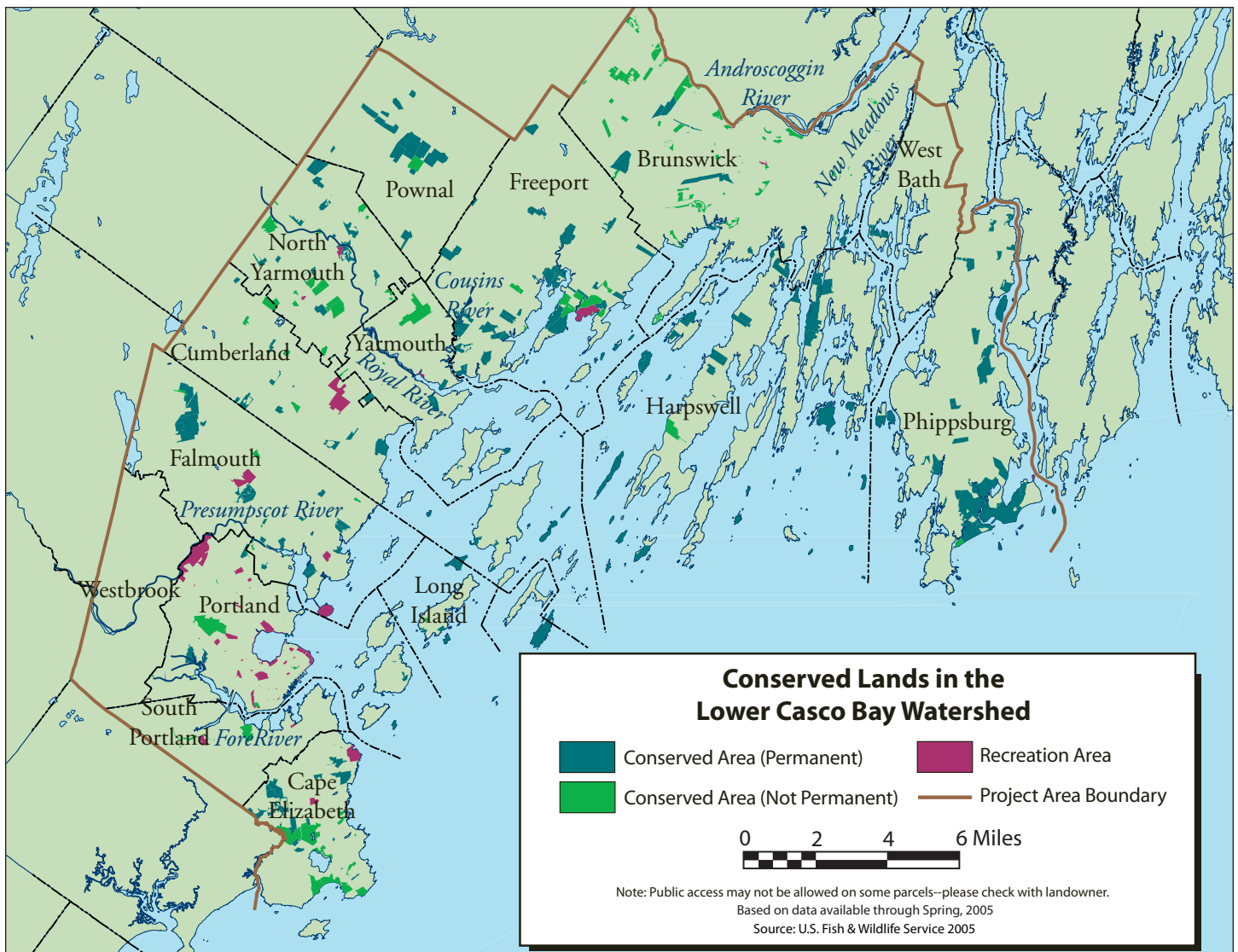
In 1997, in order to track the effectiveness of protecting important habitat and open space, CBEP, with significant technical support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Gulf of Maine Coastal Program and the cooperation of land trusts in the region, compiled a detailed geographic information system database and map to document the extent of protected lands in the lower 15 towns of the watershed. In 2005, CBEP enlisted the support of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Gulf of Maine Coastal Program and land trusts once again to update the protected lands coverage. In 1997, 7,300 acres of protected lands at 246 sites were documented, and in 2005, 3,600 additional acres of protected lands at 95 new sites were identified. This represents nearly a 50% increase in protected lands.



Flag Island

Flag Island, a 41.6 acre island in Casco Bay, was permanently protected in 2002 by the cooperative efforts of a unique array of federal, state and private partners, including CBEP. Flag Island is one of Maine's premier coastal nesting islands for common eiders: with more than 600 nesting pairs, Flag Island ranks as the eighth highest value island for nesting eiders statewide. The island is particularly significant for its high concentration of nesting eiders near the southern end of their breeding range. Flag Island also supports other nesting birds, including gulls, great blue herons, osprey and woodcock.

Federal and state agencies and non-government conservation partners have been instrumental in permanently protecting this island. A federal National Coastal Wetland Grant prepared by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Gulf of Maine Coastal Program provided half of the \$1 million purchase price. In addition, several hundred thousand dollars were provided by the Natural Resource Trustees for the Rhode Island North Cape Oil Spill Fund as compensation for the wintering eiders killed in the North Cape spill. Remaining funds were provided by the Land for Maine's Future Program, the Maine Outdoor Heritage Program, the Julie N Oil Spill Fund and the CBEP Habitat Protection Fund. Additional funds from the North Cape spill are being used to monitor and manage the nesting eiders.



Definitions: Conserved Area (Permanent): Land protected from development through permanent conservation easements, restrictions, or ownership; Conserved Area (Not Permanent): Land protected from development through term conservation easements, restrictions, or current use. Status may change when land is transferred or taken out of current use. Includes land primarily used for undeveloped recreation, water supply protection, or education; Recreation Area: Land which is primarily used for developed recreation (e.g. ballfields), with remaining open areas providing conservation.

What Are-And Are Not-Protected Lands?

Not all land that community members think is protected from development actually is. Therefore, in developing a database of protected lands, it is important to clarify the multiple forms of land ownership that provide varying levels of protection for natural resource values. For example, natural areas such as town forests and parks are often assumed to be permanently protected. However, local residents have sometimes been dismayed to learn that their town forest or park has been slated for conversion to a municipal facility, or even sold for development. In addition, a conservation easement owned by a local land trust may or may not provide for permanent protection of fish and wildlife habitat values or for public access. All conservation easements are personalized to meet the needs of the landowner and the willingness of the conservation partner to accept and then enforce the terms of the easement. Conservation easements may preclude any development, or they may

permit any number of uses—including timber harvest, farming, and sometimes, limited residential or commercial development.

Documenting an increase in protected lands over time is only one measure of success in conserving fish and wildlife habitat. It is equally important to document the changing landscape matrix, increasing sprawl and the loss of habitat over time. If we truly hope to assess the changing value of the Casco Bay watershed for fish and wildlife over time, we need not only to document lands we have permanently protected—but also, the lands that we have permanently lost to residential and commercial sprawl.

References

Brookings Institution. 2001. *Who Sprawls Most? How Growth Patterns Differ Across the U.S.* Washington DC. <http://www.brookings.edu/es/urban/publications/fulton.pdf>