

Are There Large, Undeveloped Blocks of Land in the Casco Bay Watershed?

Answer: Yes. Large areas of unfragmented, natural land still remain in the watershed, but they are becoming scarcer as development progresses.

Why Are Large, Undeveloped Blocks of Land Important?

Larger blocks of natural habitat, including forests, grasslands, and freshwater wetlands, play a vital role in the health of the Casco Bay watershed:

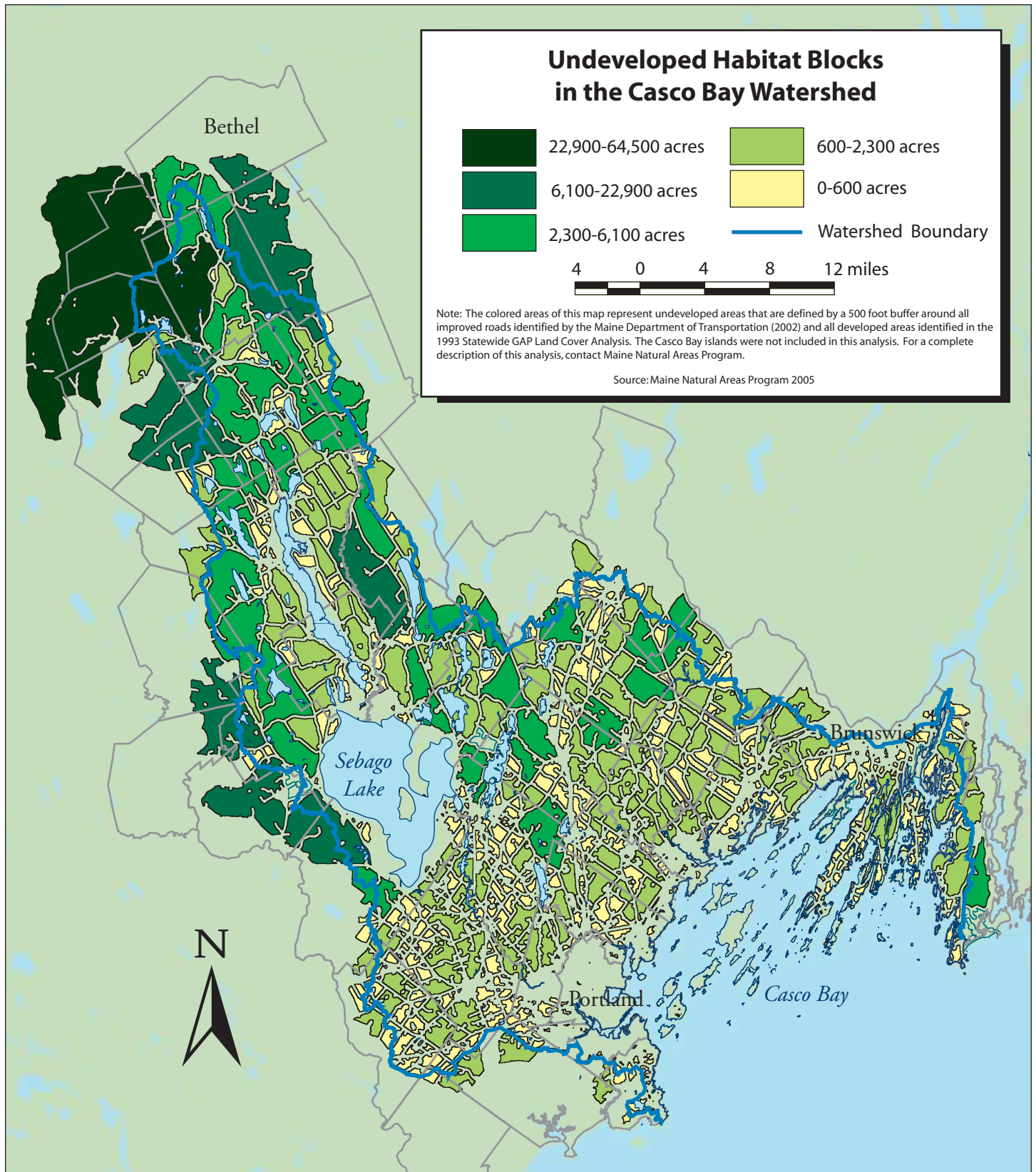
- 🌀 **For Wildlife:** Larger habitat blocks are more likely to support healthy, genetically diverse populations of many plant and wildlife species. Examples of species that require larger areas of habitat uninterrupted by roads and development include mammals like fisher and bobcat, birds of prey like the Northern Goshawk, and songbirds like the Wood Thrush. Large habitat blocks can provide refuges of higher quality habitat that is buffered from the degrading influences of surrounding development, known as “edge effects,” including reduced opportunity for plants and animals to move across the landscape, road kill, pollution, changes in light and moisture regimes, and increased threats from invasive species. Research has shown that maintaining large habitat blocks and connecting corridors between those blocks is essential to maintaining all of our native wildlife species into the future.
- 🌀 **For Healthy Ecosystems:** Larger natural areas provide important ecosystem services that protect the quality of our air, surface water, and ground water. Healthy upland and freshwater wetland ecosystems protect lakes, rivers, and streams by minimizing erosion and sedimentation and maintaining natural nutrient cycles.



The Wood Thrush requires large areas of unfragmented habitat.



- 🌀 **For Quality of Life:** Larger unfragmented natural areas can provide opportunities for outdoor recreation such as hiking, cross-country skiing, hunting, and fishing. These areas enhance the scenic and rural character of the landscape. Traditional land uses such as farming and forestry depend on these larger areas of open space. In turn, working farms and forestlands provide valuable habitat for a variety of plants and wildlife.



Large blocks of undeveloped natural land play a critical role in supporting healthy native wildlife populations and diverse and functioning ecosystems. In the Casco Bay watershed, the largest blocks of undeveloped land are located in the northwestern portion of the watershed. Some of the less densely developed municipalities such as Bridgton and Waterford have large blocks (>2,000 acres) of land that remain unfragmented by development.

Land Area in Unfragmented Blocks by Town in Casco Bay Watershed

What Can Be Done to Maintain Large Undeveloped Blocks of Land?

As development progresses in the Casco Bay watershed, larger unfragmented natural areas are becoming scarcer. The map on page 23 shows the undeveloped blocks remaining in the Casco Bay watershed, as mapped by the state's Beginning with Habitat program. The table provides data on undeveloped blocks by town. Although most of the largest blocks are in the upper part of the watershed, some substantial blocks remain in Windham, Gray, New Gloucester, and other towns. The Maine Beginning with Habitat program provides each town with local maps of undeveloped blocks, valuable habitat, public and conservation lands, wetlands and impervious surface coverage. The program also makes presentations to the towns which include suggested conservation strategies to help towns grow wisely. Good land use planning is the key to maintaining these larger blocks and all of their values for people and wildlife into the future.



Large habitat blocks are essential to the bobcat.

Town	Net land in 250+ acre blocks (acres)	Net land in 2000+ acre blocks (acres)	Total Non-water Acres	% land in 250+ acre blocks	% land in 2000+ acre blocks
Auburn	14,316	3,864	37,877	38%	10%
Baldwin	15,800	9,945	22,627	70%	44%
Bethel	31,711	29,572	41,093	77%	72%
Bridgton	23,182	15,979	36,211	64%	44%
Brunswick	10,375	2,166	29,739	35%	7%
Buxton	11,494	0	25,813	45%	0%
Cape Elizabeth	1,092	0	9,004	12%	0%
Casco	12,380	11,343	19,842	62%	57%
Cumberland	6,106	1,057	14,496	42%	7%
Denmark	21,536	17,702	29,421	73%	60%
Durham	15,565	6,252	24,424	64%	26%
Falmouth	5,668	579	18,607	30%	3%
Freeport	9,011	434	22,014	41%	2%
Gorham	13,662	0	32,387	42%	0%
Gray	15,192	6,929	27,611	55%	25%
Greenwood	20,963	20,059	26,590	79%	75%
Harpswell	1,423	0	5,498	26%	0%
Harrison	12,809	2,442	21,052	61%	12%
Hiram	17,628	1,256	23,939	74%	5%
Naples	12,332	3,374	20,187	61%	17%
New Gloucester	17,930	6,841	30,111	60%	23%
North Yarmouth	7,279	1,083	13,540	54%	8%
Norway	17,816	12,011	28,534	62%	42%
Otisfield	18,994	14,388	25,395	75%	57%
Phippsburg	9,984	2,886	17,818	56%	16%
Poland	15,932	2,730	27,056	59%	10%
Portland	64	0	11,552	1%	0%
Pownal	8,142	251	14,524	56%	2%
Raymond	13,452	7,873	21,142	64%	37%
Scarborough	10,479	1,760	30,056	35%	6%
Sebago	14,117	10,056	20,865	68%	48%
South Portland	104	0	7,664	1%	0%
Standish	22,076	13,789	37,530	59%	37%
Stoneham	19,210	19,105	21,484	89%	89%
Sweden	14,175	10,527	18,409	77%	57%
Waterford	21,964	19,060	32,059	69%	59%
West Bath	3,709	0	7,526	49%	0%
Westbrook	3,394	0	10,920	31%	0%
Windham	11,219	4,227	29,688	38%	14%
Yarmouth	1,827	0	7,458	24%	0%

Note: Total area of each town was calculated by subtracting the area of surface water features (in MEGIS layer "HYD24POL") from the total area within the town boundaries (from MEGIS layer "METWP24"). Block sizes exclude surface water, although water was not considered a fragmenting feature for the blocks analysis. Long Island was not included in this analysis.

Source: Beginning With Habitat Program 2005.