

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Casco Bay Estuary Partnership leads project to replace culvert, save salt marsh habitat in Thomas Bay

Portland, ME—This week, the Thomas Bay marsh in Brunswick will receive a much-needed makeover.

On Tuesday, August 16, the USM-based Casco Bay Estuary Partnership (CBEP), in collaboration with Brunswick Public Works and the New Meadows Watershed Partnership, will oversee the installation of a new culvert near the Adams Road causeway, one of the oldest roads in Brunswick. The pipe arch culvert, a device used to channel water underneath a typically man-made structure, replaces a much older, metal and granite-block culvert whose deterioration has recently demanded costly repairs and elicited attention among environmentalists and organizations concerned about the future of Thomas Bay marsh and the organisms which inhabit the wetland area.

Part of the New Meadows River Watershed in eastern Casco Bay, the 60-acre Thomas Bay marsh is a diverse ecosystem that serves as a nursery habitat for commercially valuable fish; clam harvesters know Thomas Bay for its productive flats. However, the deterioration, insufficient width, and height of the current culvert has blocked the flow of tide water across the marsh surface, causing erosion and impounded water during low tide. Researchers believe that the undersized culvert has led to a loss of salt marsh habitat upstream of Adams Road, and could have led to further destruction if not addressed.

“Marshes act like sponges,” explained Matt Craig, CBEP technical program coordinator. “They absorb water and nutrients, which protects coastal areas from flooding. Updated infrastructure, such as this culvert, can help ensure that these areas are getting proper water flow.”

The new culvert, made up of 56 individual aluminum plates, is 60 feet long and 13.1 feet wide at its base—8 feet wider than the current culvert. Crews from Brunswick Public Works have pre-assembled the massive tube and hope to install it during one low tide cycle on Tuesday.

Plans for the culvert replacement began in 2009 between the Brunswick natural resources planner and the CBEP, which studied the marsh and determined it suitable as a salt marsh habitat restoration project. Funded by a grant from the GOMC-NOAA Habitat Restoration Partnership, project planning began in fall 2010, with development of engineering designs and marsh monitoring. The project represents a new initiative for the CBEP to restore degraded coastal wetlands around Casco Bay, which has historically been threatened by human impact.

“The goal is to improve this marsh’s habitat, to improve tidal exchange and deliver more seawater to the marsh upstream of the road. This is important in part because it will make the marsh more resilient to long-term changes like sea level rise,” Craig said. “But this project can also teach us how to successfully implement similar restoration efforts in an era of limited budgets. In this project, we have a good example of how a collaborative approach can benefit both our communities and Casco Bay.”

For further information regarding the culvert installation project, please contact the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership at (207) 228-8359 or mcraig@usm.maine.edu.

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The Casco Bay Estuary Partnership (CBEP), housed at the University of Southern Maine's Muskie School of Public Service, is one of 28 national estuary programs and supports a mission to protect and restore the water quality and fish and wildlife habitat of the Casco Bay ecosystem, while ensuring compatible human uses of the Bay. The CBEP works closely with numerous organizations including local, state, and federal government, nonprofits, local businesses, citizens, and universities. Partnership projects and research facilitate effective management of Casco Bay and its watershed through leadership, strategic funding of local initiatives, and facilitation of effective collaboration among the many groups working to improve the health of Casco Bay. <http://www.cascobay.usm.maine.edu/>