

SECTION SIX



Living Resources/ Indicator Species



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Introduction

Protecting the quality and quantity of habitat is necessary to maintain biological diversity in and around Casco Bay. It is individual species, however, that often capture our attention and provide daily reminders that natural communities are in balance. Certain species, due to their unique habitat requirements or role within ecological communities, serve as broader indicators of the health of natural systems. Section Six addresses the following indicator species assemblages:

- **Eelgrass.** Eelgrass beds provide critical habitat for several commercially important fisheries. Eelgrass is a key biological indicator of the Bay's water quality because it both contributes to and depends upon good water quality. Monitoring eelgrass status provides information about physical/chemical conditions and ecological health in Casco Bay.
- **Waterbirds.** Estuaries are important seasonal stopovers in the Atlantic Flyway for migratory birds and provide essential habitat for several migratory and resident species. Waterbirds are among our most observable and charismatic fauna, and monitoring their status in Casco Bay serves as an important and visible indicator of estuarine and watershed health.
- **Marine invasive species.** Marine invasive species threaten to irreversibly change the structure of marine communities in Casco Bay and the Gulf of Maine, with significant implications for marine-based industry. Tracking the status and trends of these exotic species provides information about threats to the marine ecosystem.