



Estuaries of Casco Bay: Salt and fresh waters hard at work

Our most under-appreciated resource?

It is easy to overlook the fact that Casco Bay's estuaries – peaceful waters where salt and fresh water mix – **are among the world's most productive habitats.** In fact, these estuaries support **more than 850 species** of marine life, from microscopic plants and animals to migrating fish, birds, seals, and pilot whales.

Casco Bay acts as a giant mixing bowl.

All estuaries mix ocean water and fresh water. But here, our big tides, small rivers, and large Bay make our estuary unique, with more ocean water than most. In fact, we have nearly 200 square miles of Bay where powerful tides pump sea water into Casco Bay twice daily.

If you eat seafood, you need healthy estuaries.

Two thirds of all commercially important seafood species spend some part of their lives in an estuary.



Casco Bay is one of 28 estuaries designated as an "Estuary of National Significance" by an act of Congress.

STRIPERS found in Casco Bay may come from as far away as Chesapeake Bay



An estuary works as a mixer powered by tides, that mingles nutrients, oxygen, and fresh and salt waters throughout Casco Bay



Strainer where plants, especially salt marsh grasses, trap debris particles and strain out sediment in stormwater runoff



Rich soup of phytoplankton, zooplankton, and essential nutrients such as nitrogen



Nursery that shelters, protects, and feeds young marine life and birds



Sponge and buffer that absorbs and retains rain runoff and snowmelt from pavement, preventing flooding. Coastal wetlands absorb storm surges and wave energy, preventing erosion



Cleanser where roots and microorganisms absorb nitrogen and break down some of the toxins that enter salt marshes



Rest stop for migrating birds and fish



Grocery store that provides nutritious foods for birds, mammals, and other marine life

THE WATERSHED THAT DRAINS INTO CASCO BAY touches 42 towns including some of Maine's fastest growing communities.

Rainwater — and everything it collects along the way — funnels through more than 1,356 miles of small rivers and streams to the Bay. Casco Bay, with more than 780 islands, islets, and ledges, creates a huge protected mixing bowl where ocean and fresh waters meet.

