

Conserved Lands More Than Double over Two Decades

Casco Bay Estuary
PARTNERSHIP

The total acreage of permanently protected lands in the watershed's lower 16 municipalities has more than doubled, from 3.5 percent (7,300 acres) in 1997 to 9.1 percent (18,960 acres) in 2015.



Suckfish Bog, Falmouth

Conserved Lands Provide Valuable but Often Unquantified Benefits

The Casco Bay watershed includes a mosaic of forest and aquatic habitats that support wildlife, help filter air and water, buffer development impacts and enhance recreational offerings and quality of life. Researchers are now exploring ways to quantify the value of protected land as “green infrastructure,” which provides water-quality benefits and other valued services to both human and natural communities.

The Casco Bay watershed is home to at least 25 nonprofit organizations directly involved in land conservation. About half the towns in the watershed have conservation commissions, which are generally volunteer-based municipal commissions that work to improve management of open space. Voters have repeatedly supported bonds to fund land protection through the Land for Maine's Future Fund, which has protected 570,438 acres for conservation and recreation statewide since its inception, with 7,671 of those acres (and an additional 3,512 acres of farmland) falling in Cumberland County (Maine DACF 2015).

Collaborative Work Leads to Steady Gains in Conserved Acreage

Since 1997, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Gulf of Maine Coastal Program, with significant funding from CBEP, has maintained a geographic database of conserved and open space lands in the lower 16 municipalities of the Casco Bay watershed (Cape Elizabeth, South Portland, Portland, Westbrook, Long Island, Chebeague Island, Falmouth, Cumberland, Yarmouth, North Yarmouth, Pownal, Freeport,

Brunswick, Harpswell, West Bath, and Phippsburg). It includes lands subject to different levels of protection: (1) conserved lands that are permanently protected; (2) open space lands that lack permanent protection, including lands in agriculture or tree growth programs, lands conserved to protect drinking water, and town forests; and (3) recreational lands that offer some additional conservation or habitat benefits.

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As of 2015, the database includes 956 parcels in the 16 municipalities, with more than 28,990 acres, representing 13.8 percent of the area. A majority of those lands, some 18,960 acres—about 9.1

percent of the area—is considered permanently protected. This compares with 3.7 million acres that have been protected statewide, equivalent to 19 percent of Maine's total land area (Maine Development Foundation, 2014).

Level of Protection	Number of Parcels	Total Acres Protected	Percent of Casco Bay Coastal Communities Area (Study Area)
Conserved-permanent	531	18,959.77	9.1%
Conserved-not permanent	308	8,041.91	3.8%
Recreation area	117	1,988.89	0.9%
TOTAL	956	28,990.57	13.8%

Thanks to the diligence and persistence of many regional organizations, the area of permanently protected land today is 2.6 times greater than it was in 1997.

For additional references and information, please view the Bibliography of the full *State of the Bay 2015* report at www.cascobayestuary.org/state-of-the-bay-2015.

Year	Number of Sites	Area Permanently Protected	Percent of Casco Bay Coastal Communities Area (Study Area)
1997	246	7,300	3.5%
2005	341	10,900	5.2%
2010	438	15,694	7.5%
2015	531	18,960	9.1%

