



# Casco Bay Estuary

PARTNERSHIP

Caring for our waters together

## Casco Bay Habitat Protection Fund Spring 2026 Request for Proposals

### Overview

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Casco Bay Estuary Partnership, in partnership with Maine Coast Heritage Trust, Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Gulf of Maine Coastal Program, requests proposals for the Spring 2026 Casco Bay Habitat Protection Fund. The Fund supports permanent protection of parcels in the Casco Bay watershed that are integral to aquatic ecosystems and secure and expand public access to water resources and open space. CBEP's ultimate objective is to protect 20% of the watershed by 2030.

The Fund aims to be strategic in advancing land protection through key stages. Expenses may vary by project but might include early "due diligence" expenses, exploratory projects with a compelling potential outcome, or projects that are a strong fit with the Fund focus on water, but which may be difficult to finance. Innovative practices such as use of riparian easements are encouraged, as are projects that incorporate aquatic habitat restoration. Grants often serve as seed money for larger campaigns.

**Proposals up to \$25,000 will be considered for this round**, but actual grant awards may be lower and will depend on the number and quality of proposals received. *(Awards greater than \$10,000 will now be classified as subawards and therefore must comply with the federal funding guidance, including entering into a formal agreement with the University of Southern Maine.)*

**Applicants are asked to share tax parcel lot/map information with CBEP by 3/6/26. Maps will be sent to applicants by the end of March. Completed applications are due Friday, 4/10/26 at 5:00 p.m.**

To access the application please visit: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc6gYP6FtqrE7vVQKIUpE9pDvYYkKuyz8HtraERnBFDFG-ICQ/viewform?usp=sharing&ouid=107186194186135758002>.

### Application Requirements

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1. Projects must be located within the Casco Bay watershed (see [map](#)), including the Calendar Islands.
2. Proposals should target properties with one or more of the following characteristics:
  - a. Shoreline on tidal waters, coastal streams, main stem rivers, or perennial streams.

- b. Coastal wetlands, low-lying areas suitable for marsh migration, and adjacent upland buffers.
  - c. Freshwater wetlands, including floodplains and naturally occurring vernal pools.
  - d. *Beginning with Habitat* Focus Areas ([fact sheets](#)).
  - e. Conservation priorities identified by local, regional, or statewide habitat-focused plans.
  - f. Forested areas adjacent to headwater streams.
- 3. Eligible applicants include tax-exempt 501(c)(3) land trusts, or units of government.
- 4. Individual conservation projects are eligible to receive up to two grants total from the Fund.
- 5. Applicants may submit proposals for different projects in the same round.

## Eligible Expenses

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- 1. Early transaction costs such as boundary surveys, attorney fees, environmental assessments, appraisal costs, recording fees, title research, or other "due diligence" costs.
- 2. Costs associated with securing a conservation easement or fee ownership.
- 3. Stewardship funds are eligible if an applicant can demonstrate that they are necessary for the project to succeed.

Projects that focus on restoration of aquatic habitat may align with other CBEP strategic priorities but would require a different application process. Please contact CBEP for clarification.

## Requirements for all Properties Protected

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- 1. All lands protected must be managed for habitat conservation. The applicant must ensure permanent protection and management of the property for its natural resource values in perpetuity.
- 2. Public access, permitted in a manner sensitive to habitat values, must be assured in perpetuity.
- 3. If intensive land management activities are envisioned on the property, they should be conducted in an ecologically sensitive manner, consistent with the overarching purpose of protecting high value habitat. If forestry, limited agriculture, or other intensive practices are anticipated, the applicant must provide a detailed review of these activities in the proposal and describe legal and other mechanisms for ensuring compliance with long-term management goals.
- 4. In outreach efforts associated with land acquisition, CBEP will provide a logo and requests recognition as a partner involved in supporting the land protection initiative. In written materials, we request that "Casco Bay Habitat Protection Fund" be credited as co-administered in partnership with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service - Gulf of Maine Coastal Program, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, and the Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife.
- 5. Although it is not a requirement to receive a grant through the Fund, the provision of non-federal matching funds for CBEP's federal contribution to the completions of an acquisition project is strongly encouraged. This commitment will need to be documented in writing on the organization's letterhead and is typically requested in the summer.

## Application Process

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The process for applying is as follows:

1. Interested parties should notify CBEP and provide tax parcel lot/map information as soon as possible, and no later than 3/6/2026. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Gulf of Maine Coastal Program will then prepare a set of maps on a first come/first served basis. Maps will be provided to applicants for use in developing proposals when they are completed.
2. Applicants should submit an electronic copy of the following items to CBEP by COB 4/10/26.
  - a. Cover letter briefly describing the project and requesting funds;
  - b. A completed Habitat Protection Fund application OR a pre-existing grant application with supplemental information as needed (especially p.1 of the HPF application form);
  - c. Series of habitat maps prepared by USFWS, as described above;
  - d. An appraisal summary sheet or opinion of value, if available;
  - e. A budget, preferably in Excel, outlining the total project costs, committed matching funds, and potential funding sources (both for the project and for any planned stewardship/management); and,
  - f. Medium-resolution photos of the parcel suitable for use in CBEP outreach and reporting (provide credits).

If the applicant is applying for a similar grant program (such as LMF or NAWCA), this application may be submitted in lieu of the CBEP application as long as all criteria are met by the alternative application.

Depending on availability of the review committee, a site visit may be requested by the applicant during the application process.

**CBEP intends to announce funding decisions by the end of April.**

## Selection Criteria

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The following criteria will be used by the Committee to select projects for funding:

### **Minimum Requirements –**

- Land will be managed for habitat conservation in perpetuity.
- Public access will be secured in perpetuity. (Exceptions only if access would threaten critical conservation values).

### **Scoring Criteria –**

- **Habitat Values and Disturbance:** quality and diversity of habitat provided for fish, wildlife, and/or plant communities and the level of human disturbance.
- **Need for Protection:** urgency of threat from development or degradation.
- **Public Access:** public access considerations, including enhancements to recreational, cultural, and educational opportunities.
- **Larger Vision:** alignment with broader conservation plans or initiatives.
- **Surrounding Land:** land to be protected connects or expands existing protected areas.
- **Long Term Management:** stewardship capacity and long-term management objectives to ensure success of completion, including minimal negative impact from current/future uses.
- The extent to which this project directly supports an aquatic ecosystem (e.g., coastal,

- riverine, and freshwater habitats).
- Cost-effectiveness of proposal, including matching funds.

Habitat values will be analyzed and prioritized using a standardized set of maps prepared by USFWS Gulf of Maine Coastal Program, which generally include:

- *Beginning With Habitat (BWH) Riparian Resources*
- *BWH Resources as documented by Maine DIFW, Maine Natural Areas Program, Maine Dept. of Marine Resources and USFWS*
- *Regional conservation lands and BWH Undeveloped Habitat Blocks*
- *Parcel map on aerial imagery*
- *Nature's Network Conservation Design ([naturesnetwork.org](http://naturesnetwork.org))*
- Applicants are also welcome, but not required, to submit additional information such as:
- Applicant-provided site environmental surveys
- Other GIS-based habitat analyses and models as available
- Local knowledge and site visit observations

## Casco Bay Estuary Partnership Habitat Protection Committee

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The CBEP Habitat Protection Committee, comprised of representatives from CBEP, USFWS, MaineDIFW, EPA, and MCHT, evaluates proposals and provides recommendations to CBEP for allocation of funding.



\*Committee members' contact information is provided below to help answer relevant substantive information while drafting your application. For any questions regarding grant/application processes, please direct all questions to Natalie Bingham at [natalie.bingham@maine.edu](mailto:natalie.bingham@maine.edu).

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## Proposal Submission

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Applications will be considered complete when information requested in the application form has been provided and any supplement materials (photos, maps) have been included as attachments.

[Final application submissions](#) are due by Friday, April 10, 2026 at 5:00 p.m.