

Blue Hill Bay Watershed Needs Assessment January 2013

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- **Project Partners:** Town representatives, businesses, community-based organizations, and residents
- **Public Comment:** View document at www.hcpcme.org/bluehillbay.
Submit comments by April 16 to tmartin@hcpcme.org



Project Summary:

The Blue Hill Bay Needs Assessment is a multi-town, multi-stakeholder initiative designed to engage communities in a dialogue to better understand their resources, assess the status of the resources, and make informed decisions about coastal activities which impact these resources. Eight communities make up the watershed of Blue Hill Bay: Tremont, Mount Desert, Bar Harbor, Trenton, Ellsworth, Surry, Blue Hill and Brooklin. The communities benefit from the economic and aesthetic assets of the bay, such as fisheries, tourism, and recreation. They also contribute to the health of the bay via factors such as stormwater runoff and coastal activities. In addition to background information on demographics, economics, and geography, the report addresses four major areas of concern: fisheries, tourism and recreation, water quality, and landuse and development.

Key Findings and Issues

- Local governments have a limited capacity to address watershed planning.
- The total year-round population of the eight towns in the watershed increased by 32 percent between 1980 and 2010. Some towns, however, are losing year-round population for various reasons.

Summary of Recommendations

Fisheries

- Regional Shellfish Ordinances: the towns of Blue Hill Bay might create a multi-town shellfish ordinance in order to reduce costs of license administration and warden fees, enhance conservation efforts, provide water quality improvement incentives, and enhance harvester involvement.
- Public Access: In order to ensure access to the shore, towns can work with land trusts or directly with landowners to acquire the land, and/or enter into private agreement with landowners.
- Shellfish Conservation: Continue reseeding efforts to make clams a sustainable and renewable resource for future generations and undertake other conservation measures.
- Fish passage: In order to ensure fish passage and to support healthy migratory fish runs, towns should inspect all stream crossings (bridges, culverts, etc) and repair those crossings that do not provide adequate passage.
- Aquaculture: Bring together shellfish growers, landowners, municipal officials, and community members to discuss and map areas that are appropriate for safe, sustainable aquaculture by species.

Tourism and Recreation

- Inter-local management of critical natural resources and public infrastructure: When towns work together, issues such as public access, preserving water-dependent uses, all-tides boat launches, recreational fishing and kayaking, and waste management may proceed more efficiently.
- Infrastructure Investment: Additional infrastructure is needed for public access to all-tides boat ramps and docks, bayside trails and shoreland for walking, sites for camping, picnics, kayak tours and public events, and sanitary “pump-outs” in harbors

Water Quality:

- Funding: Municipalities should apply for funding to repair sewage problems that cause clam flat closures. Programs in MDEP, MDMR, and Maine Coastal Program can provide technical assistance.
- Development: Municipalities should encourage the adoption of Low-Impact Development practices at all development sites.
- Acidification: Municipal shellfish committees should consider implementing a clam flat buffering program to offset the impacts of ocean acidification. Work with state for technical assistance.
- Sewage: Municipalities should increase education and outreach efforts that encourage boaters to use the pump-out stations and pump-out boats.

Landuse and Development

- Water Quality: In order to mitigate the impacts from storm water run-off, towns can enact low impact development standards that minimize the volume runoff when new construction occurs. Towns could continue and expand septic tank inspection programs. They could also assess current boat pump-out stations and if proven necessary, add new systems and expand the capacity of existing stations.
- Public Access: Encourage towns to undertake a comprehensive public access/harbor needs assessment. Retain/revise water-dependent use standards in shoreland zoning ordinances for those sites where commercial fishing operations occur. Implement parking policies at public access points that allow for adequate boat/trailer parking. Promote cost-effective measures in those towns with inadequate all-tides access to increase the hours when access is available.

Next Steps

A Needs Assessment is the preliminary part of a larger more comprehensive planning process. The goal of this project was to introduce the concept of the bay as a shared resource and how communities can work together to sustainably protect and manage the resource. Next steps for the communities include:

- Form a group of dedicated stakeholders representing each town who will gather regularly to continue discussion of the concerns already raised. If successful, the group could use the model proposed by the Frenchman Bay Partners.
- Once a stakeholder group is formed, the communities should continue the planning process. Although many of the towns have comprehensive plans, a regional stakeholder group could develop a regional comprehensive plan for the bay.
- Once a regional group and regional plan is developed, communities should work closely with state and federal agencies to implement some the recommendations from the Needs Assessment and any other additional plans.
- The most important next step is for communities to keep their concerns on the "front burner." By working closely with conservation organizations, the Hancock County Planning Commission, municipal governments, and community health and economic organizations, community members can strengthen their voice and effectively develop solutions for resource concerns.



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