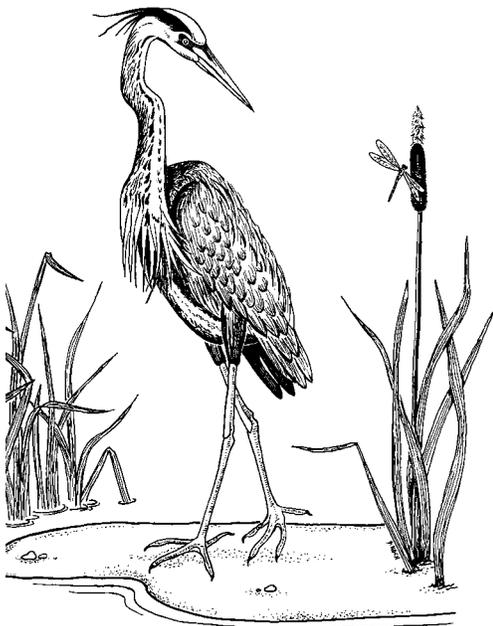


## Gulf of Maine Coastal Program



For further information, please contact:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Gulf of Maine Coastal Program  
4R Fundy Road  
Falmouth, Maine 04105  
(207) 781-8364  
FAX (207) 781-8369  
fw5es\_gomp@fws.gov  
<http://gulfofmaine.fws.gov>  
Project Leader, Stewart Fefer



### *Casco Bay: identifying and protecting important habitats*

Casco Bay, located where New England's northern rockbound coastline meets southern beaches and salt marshes, is surrounded by 15 Maine towns. Though still rich in natural values, Casco Bay and its surrounding watershed are subject to threats of increasing development.

In coordination with the Casco Bay National Estuary Project, USFWS Gulf of Maine Program biologists completed an analysis of fish and wildlife habitats and existing conservation lands in the towns surrounding Casco Bay. Using data collected by Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Maine Dept. of Marine Resources, Maine Office of GIS, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's National Wetland Inventory and Maine Audubon Society, Gulf of Maine Program biologists identified and ranked important wildlife areas for colonial waterbirds, seabirds, wading birds, anadromous and freshwater fish, eelgrass, cordgrass, marine worms, shellfish and endangered/threatened species (bald eagles, roseate terns, piping plovers and least terns). Biologists also used satellite imagery to identify and map current land use in the area. All data was combined to create a composite map highlighting important habitat for the species evaluated. Findings were reviewed by a panel of biologists from state agencies and non-governmental organizations, and their comments were incorporated in the final report and accompanying maps. Next, the Casco Bay Estuary Project, with substantial technical support from the Gulf of Maine Program, local land trusts and town planners, developed a comprehensive and current map identifying conservation lands in the 15 towns. Information on lands in conservation ownership has been integrated with the information on important wildlife habitats. The Gulf of Maine Program and other cooperators have distributed all of this information to interested individuals, local land trusts, town planners, conservation commissions and other conservation organizations in the region. The data is being incorporated into town Open Space Plans and is helping land trusts focus and support habitat protection initiatives. In addition, the Casco Bay National Estuary Project has established the Casco Bay Important Habitats Fund to help support acquisition and permanent protection of high value habitat. The fund is administered by Casco Bay NEP, Maine Coast Heritage Trust and the Gulf of Maine Program.

The Gulf of Maine Program and the Casco Bay National Estuary Project staffs also explored a related question: "What would happen to existing fish and wildlife habitat if the towns surrounding Casco Bay developed to the extent permitted by current land protection plans?" The Casco Bay National Estuary Project staff completed a preliminary "build-out analysis" of the region by working with town planners to determine potential future land cover. The Gulf of Maine Program integrated the build-out analysis with the composite habitat map to identify important areas that could be threatened. This information, once verified on a town-by-town basis, may help focus voluntary, locally-initiated habitat protection efforts towards those areas most threatened by development pressures.

Visit our web site or contact the Gulf of Maine Program for:

- a more detailed 4-page version of this fact sheet,
- a CD and its associated data catalog to view and interpret habitat maps (using ArcView computer software), or
- a copy of the 75-page technical report which includes maps of important habitats.