

Gulf of Maine Coastal Program



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Habitat protection in Maine

Nearly a century ago, farsighted people began working to protect Maine's natural beauty. Past conservation successes continue to inspire people, and today, there are nearly 100 locally and state-based land trusts, as well state and federal agencies and individual landowners working in Maine to protect important habitat for its scenic, cultural, recreational and biological values. However, only a small percentage of Maine's landscape is currently protected under conservation ownership in perpetuity – one of the lowest percentages of public lands in the country. In the past decade, the pace of development has accelerated in Maine. People are spreading out in a land-consumptive pattern of urban sprawl around traditional city and town centers. Coastal properties are “hot” in the real estate market, stressing our collective ability to locate and protect coastal lands with rich biological resources. In addition, traditional timber company ownership in the North Woods is changing rapidly, with prime lakefront and riverfront properties being converted to home sites. These emerging patterns threaten to degrade, fragment and eliminate much-needed habitat for fish and wildlife and reduce public access for outdoor recreation.

Since its inception, Gulf of Maine Program has focused attention on identifying highest value habitat for migratory birds, diadromous fish and federally threatened and endangered species – and then, working in partnership with willing landowners and other interested stakeholders, raising needed funds to permanently protect these areas before they are lost forever. In order to help direct land protection efforts to high value habitat, and to provide credible data to support important land protection proposals, Gulf of Maine Program biologists have completed several key habitat analyses, focusing primarily on rare and declining migratory birds of concern, diadromous fish (with an emphasis on federally endangered Atlantic salmon) and coastal nesting islands.

Gulf of Maine Program staff shares biological information and habitat maps with land protection partners to help inform and support land protection efforts. For example, Petit Manan National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Lake Umbagog NWR and Rachel Carson NWR have used data from our analyses to inform their land acquisition efforts. We have also incorporated our data in “Beginning with Habitat,” a state-federal initiative to provide Maine towns and land trusts with important habitat information to direct development activities away from high value habitat and to encourage efforts to permanently protect high value habitat. We also use our experience and knowledge to support and advise state agencies and land trust partners so that they can successfully compete for federal grants to acquire and permanently protect important habitat.

To-date, we have been successful in working with land protection partners to bring more than \$16.5 million in federal grant funds from the following funding sources to directly support habitat protection initiatives in Maine:

- North American Wetlands Conservation Act grants
 - Large grants (\$5M)
 - Small grants (\$325K)
- National Coastal Wetland Conservation Act grants (\$2M)
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grants (\$6M)
- Land and Waters Conservation Act grants (\$3M)
- Casco Bay Estuary Project Habitat Protection Fund grants (\$220K)

Using a flexible, non-regulatory and voluntary approach to protecting habitat, we have coordinated with partners around the state to permanently protect more than 830,000 acres of coastal nesting islands, riparian habitat along wild Atlantic salmon rivers, coastal salt marshes, and North Woods forests, lakes and wetlands.