



## **Report Reveals Bay is Healthy For Now Suburbanization Poses Risks for the Future**

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(Portland, ME) – The Casco Bay Estuary Partnership announced today the release of its 2010 State of the Bay Report. Published every five years, the Report describes progress toward achieving goals outlined in the Casco Bay Plan, a comprehensive guide to managing natural resources of the Bay and its watershed. Findings will be presented at a State of the Bay Conference on October 21, 2010 at the Windham Portland Airport Hotel in South Portland.

“The Report represents the most thorough analysis we could assemble of the condition of Casco Bay and its watershed,” said Curtis Bohlen, PhD, director of the Partnership. “Its findings are based on a set of 18 environmental indicators, which have been adopted by the Partnership as a way of assessing the Bay’s health.”

**The Bay and its watershed are largely healthy, according to the Report.** The region is mostly forested, with developed lands making up a relatively small proportion of the total watershed. As a consequence, most of the region's lakes, rivers and coastal waters remain in good health. This helps support robust tourism, recreation, and resource-based businesses in the region and helps define the sense of place that makes this region attractive not only for visitors, but for those who live, work and raise families here.

**Despite this good news, the Report also finds troubling trends.** While industrial discharges were a major factor limiting water quality in the past, today’s problems are mostly related to changing land use and suburbanization. The watershed’s population continues to grow, and new development is concentrated in outlying communities that were rural only a generation ago. This dispersed settlement pattern strains municipal and state budgets and risks degrading wildlife habitat and water quality.

Of those streams and rivers in the region that fail to meet state water quality standards, most are located in urban and suburban communities, where pollution stems from a variety of sources such as road runoff and excess or improper use of lawn chemicals. The Report shows that runoff in the region is enriched with heavy metals and toxic hydrocarbons (PAHs). Pesticide residues are found in area streams, sometimes at levels harmful to aquatic life.

The region's population growth and land use patterns also create problems for the area's coastal waters. While Casco Bay is generally healthy, poorer water quality conditions can be found in isolated areas, especially near population centers. Most toxic chemicals in the Bay's sediments have declined over the past few decades, but those related to automobile use are on the increase.

About a quarter of the clam flats in Casco Bay are permanently closed to harvests, primarily due to threat of contamination by human waste from failing septic tanks, overboard discharges, and combined sewer overflows (CSOs), which wash untreated sewage into rivers or the Bay during heavy rainfall. In suburban areas, the cumulative effects of suburban runoff result in additional closures.

“Some of the challenges facing the watershed have been on our radar for decades,” Bohlen said. “But we have also identified issues of emerging concern, including climate change, invasive species, nutrient pollution, and 'emerging contaminants' - novel toxic chemicals either not recognized as harmful a generation ago or not yet produced.”

The Report also highlights recent efforts by businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies to protect the Bay and its watershed. For example, the City of Portland's efforts to fix CSOs have reduced these pollutant-laden discharges by an estimated 28% over the past decade. Acreage of conserved land in the watershed's coastal communities has doubled in less than 15 years. The number of permitted "overboard discharges" – sites where minimally-treated sewage is discharged into the Bay – has declined by 43% since 1997.

The Report is designed to help resource managers and municipal officials make informed land-use and environmental management decisions. The State of the Bay Conference on October 21<sup>st</sup> is open to the public and will feature presentations and roundtable discussions on topics such as habitat conservation, climate change, toxic pollution, and invasive species in Casco Bay.

The full State of the Bay Report, as well as information about the upcoming conference, can be found at the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership's website, [www.cascobayestuary.org](http://www.cascobayestuary.org).

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The Casco Bay Estuary Partnership comprises local, state, and federal government organizations, nonprofit organizations, local businesses, and citizens. It is devoted to preserving the ecological integrity of Casco Bay and ensuring compatible human uses of the bay's resources through public stewardship and effective management.