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Curtis Bohlen Named New Director of Casco Bay Estuary Partnership



PORTLAND – Each May and June, all up and down the coast of Maine, fish species such as alewives and shad gather at the mouths of rivers to begin their journey upstream to spawn. This year, however, another type of migration will be taking place. On May 1, Curtis Bohlen will begin his own journey down I-295 from his hometown of Yarmouth to Portland – albeit in a car, not in water – toward what he says is the beginning of “a dream opportunity.”

This opportunity Bohlen speaks of is the position of Executive Director of the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership (CBEP), based at the University of Southern Maine’s Muskie School of Public Service. He will be replacing Karen Young who, after six years of successful service, announced her resignation last December. Earlier this winter, the CBEP Board of Directors hired Bohlen to replace Young beginning part-time on May 1 and full-time on July 1.

Bohlen, who has extensive experience in environmental science and policy, as well as watershed management, said that once he is Executive Director, the community should not expect a big change in direction, noting that there already is a well-designed plan in place. His first step, he said, will be to assess how well the Partnership is serving the community. He plans to do that, in part, by going out and talking to stakeholders. As he speaks about the new position, his enthusiasm is often expressed with a large grin.

“I’ve been interested in estuarine and coastal topics since I was a kid,” Bohlen said, basking in the warm April sun while overlooking the Portland waterfront. “This is a dream opportunity for me.”

Bohlen said there is a lot of work to be done to keep the current plan moving ahead. Depending on what he learns from his conversations with the community, he said, CBEP's approach to implementing the plan could change.

"A change in leadership offers a good opportunity to assess what the organization can do to better serve its stakeholders, and to look where we're going," Bohlen said.

Since moving to Maine over a decade ago, Bohlen has worked as a private environmental consultant, as a restoration ecologist with Trout Unlimited and on the faculty of Bates and Colby Colleges. Before arriving in Maine, Bohlen served as a Staff Scientist for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and as an Assistant Research Scientist at the University of Maryland's Chesapeake Biological Laboratory. Bohlen holds a Ph.D. in Ecology from Cornell University, and M.S. and BS degrees in biology from Stanford University.

During Young's time as Executive Director, the Partnership made a number of significant accomplishments, said Jacki Cohen, chairperson of CBEP's Board of Directors. "Under Karen Young," Cohen said. "The organization initiated and implemented a major project on the Presumpscot River, strengthened our work in the areas of habitat protection and restoration, and initiated the identification of emerging water quality issues which we will pursue in the coming years."

"It has been such a pleasure working with so many organizations and individuals throughout the watershed for a healthy Casco Bay over the last six years," said Young. "There is a clear commitment to working together to protect the incredible resource that we have in Casco Bay. This spirit of partnership, and CBEP's work to facilitate this collaboration, are at the heart of our collective success. I look forward to watching this network of environmental stewards for the Bay grow in the future."

The Partnership has been so fortunate to have exceptionally talented leaders," Cohen said. "Our new Executive Director, Curtis Bohlen, brings to the position a very strong science and ecology background as well as substantial experience in environmental management and policy development. We wish our outgoing Director well in her new endeavors and we look forward to working with our new Director."

The Partnership was formed in 1990, when Casco Bay was designated by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as an "estuary of national significance" and included in the agency's National Estuary Program. CBEP's mission is to preserve the ecological integrity of Casco Bay and ensure compatible human uses of the Bay's resources through public stewardship and effective management. The Partnership consists of local, state, and federal officials, schools, organizations, businesses, and individuals.

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