2010

Portland Waterfront Sign: Estuaries of Casco Bay: Salt and Fresh Waters Hard at Work

Casco Bay Estuary Partnership

Montgomery Designs

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Estuaries of Casco Bay: Salt and fresh waters hard at work

Our most under-appreciated resource? It is easy to overlook the fact that Casco Bay's estuaries — peaceful waters where salt and fresh water mix — are among the world's most productive habitats. In fact, these estuaries support more than 850 species of marine life, from microscopic plants and animals to migrating fish, birds, seals, and pilot whales.

Casco Bay acts as a giant mixing bowl. All estuaries mix ocean water and fresh water. But here, our big tides, small rivers, and large Bay make our estuary unique, with more ocean water than most. In fact, we have nearly 200 square miles of Bay where powerful tides pump sea water into Casco Bay twice daily.

If you eat seafood, you need healthy estuaries. Two thirds of all commercially important seafood species spend some part of their lives in an estuary.

Nearly 20% of Maine's population lives upstream in Casco Bay's Watershed. Do you?

THE WATERSHED THAT DRAINS INTO CASCO BAY touches 43 towns including some of Maine's fastest growing communities.

Rainwater — and everything it collects along the way — funnel through more than 1,356 miles of small rivers and streams to the Bay. Casco Bay, with more than 780 islands, tidal, and fidalg creates a huge protected mixing bowl where ocean and fresh waters meet.

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Strainer: where plants, especially salt marsh grasses, trap debris particles and slow salt sediment in domesmate reach.

Sponge and buffer: fresh and salt marshes absorb and cleanse fresh water through Casco Bay's watershed.

An estuary works as a mixer powered by tides. Tides mix ocean and fresh waters throughout Casco Bay.

Cleaner: where roots and decomposed shells collect essential nutrients, plants that filter out trash.

Rest stop: a place where birds and mammals rest and refuel.

Rich soup: the estuary provides nutrients for fish, mammals, and other marine life.

Grocery store: the estuary provides fish, shellfish, and other marine life for our table.

Nursery: where young fish, shellfish, and other marine life are born.

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