

**Friends of Casco Bay  
Board Meeting – Minutes  
Online via Zoom  
Tuesday, January 18, 2022, 5:30 p.m.**

**In Attendance**

Board: Sandy Marsters (President), Steve Bushey, Howard Gray, Megan Hallett (board nominee), Bud Higgins, Pat Ianni, David Kaufman, Seb Milardo, Kirsten Piacentini, Malcolm Poole, Joan Samuelson  
Staff: Susan Bosco, Mike Doan, Will Everitt, Robby Lewis-Nash, Sarah Lyman  
Guests: Curtis Bohlen (Executive Director of the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership)

**Welcome – President Sandy Marsters**

Sandy welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Megan Hallett and Curtis Bohlen. Joanie shared a minute for the Bay, saying that she was a few minutes late to the meeting because she had to stop on her way home to take photos of the moon over Maquoit Bay.

**Casco Bay Estuary Partnership’s State of the Bay Report – Curtis Bohlen, Guest speaker and Executive Director of the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership**

Will introduced Curtis and described the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership (CBEP) as our closest partner in our work to improve and protect the health of Casco Bay. Curtis echoed Will, saying that *Friends* is CBEP’s closest partner.

Curtis began his presentation of CBEP’s State of the Bay Report. CBEP is one of 28 national estuary programs and receives its core funding from the Environmental Protection Agency. CBEP is a relatively small organization and is hosted by USM. They are charged with writing the Casco Bay Plan, a comprehensive conservation and management plan for the Bay. Curtis thinks of CBEP as a community working for Casco Bay, and a clearinghouse for information about the Bay that builds consensus between scientists, policy makers, and communities. CBEP hosts a group called the Casco Bay Monitoring Network, which includes organizations that collect data on Casco Bay. The Casco Bay Monitoring Network helps to reduce duplication and increase efficiency across these scientific projects.

Curtis said that every five years CBEP writes the State of the Bay Report, which summarizes changing conditions in the Bay and its watershed. The latest State of the Bay Report was published in December 2021. For the Report, Curtis reviewed data from over 110 organizations and used data from about 45 organizations, exemplifying the convening nature of the Partnership. Curtis said the bottom line of the report is that Casco Bay continues to be healthier than other estuaries in the northeast, partially because the watershed is heavily forested and the Bay has large tides. However, the Bay is changing.

Curtis described that investments in water quality and infrastructure pay off. For example, Portland’s investments over the past 20 years to address Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) have reduced the quantity of raw sewage that pours into the Bay during heavy rain events by approximately 50 million gallons per year. Curtis gave another example of how investments pay off by pointing to improvements in

car design and public awareness that have helped to reduce the quantity of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons in the Bay (a major class of contaminant that comes from cars and petroleum products).

Curtis said that nitrogen levels in the Bay are declining, both at nearshore and offshore sites. It is not clear why nitrogen levels are declining, but Curtis has some ideas. First, Friends of Casco Bay's advocacy has played a role, where Portland Water District now does denitrification at the East End Wastewater Treatment Facility, where summer nitrogen discharges have dropped by nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$ .

However, even though nitrogen levels are declining Curtis said levels of nitrogen and nutrients in Casco Bay remain high. Much of the data shows nitrogen levels in the Bay are above concern thresholds. For example, the mouth of the Royal River is a site with high nitrogen levels. Many of the high nitrogen sites in Casco Bay are at the mouths of rivers where freshwater meets saltwater.

Curtis said that temperature data in the Bay shows waters tend to be warmer at inshore sites and colder at offshore sites. However, this observation does not always hold true, as Curtis described that water temperatures in Portland Harbor are relatively cold, indicative of a strong tidal influence in the Harbor. Curtis said that shellfish testing shows that bacteria levels in the Bay are higher along suburban shorelines. Similar trends can be observed for pesticide contamination, where the shoreline of urbanized areas often has the highest concentrations. Curtis summarized that water circulation and location in Casco Bay dramatically affect conditions.

Curtis turned to discuss climate. In Maine, winters are warmer and shorter, while the growing season has increased by about a month. Curtis said that *Friends'* data shows the Bay has increased in temperature by about 1.5°C since 1993. Sea levels have been rising in Casco Bay at about the same rate that seas have been rising globally. Curtis said that the frequency of flooding has increased dramatically as sea levels have risen. With one foot of sea level rise, we can expect flooding to increase about 60 fold.

Seb asked who has access to the State of the Bay Report and uses it. Curtis said the Report is available online and in libraries. CBEP has looked at their website analytics in the past and observed that many scientists and DEP colleagues use the Report, as well as many university students. When they write the Report, they think of their audience as including recently elected public officials who do not know much about marine issues, and students.

David asked if the map showing multiple organization's data collection sites in Casco Bay are all continuous data collection sites or if they include one-off collections. Curtis said that it includes continuous monitoring programs, and many seasonal and one off programs.

Bud asked how we can help Curtis get out the Report's message. Curtis replied that CBEP is not allowed to be an advocacy program, and that is where organizations like *Friends* come in. Curtis hopes that the key takeaway from the report is that investments in regulations and infrastructure really matter.

Pat asked when Curtis expects to see funding increases from the federal government's infrastructure bill. Curtis said he expects the funding will come in the next six to eight months. One project that Curtis wants

to invest the funds in is a hydrodynamic model of Casco Bay, as the last model was done in the 1990s. Models like these are extremely useful for regulation and more.

Kirsten asked if groups ever present conflicting data about the Bay. Curtis said he receives data that is inconsistent all of the time, but that is always part of collecting data. However, Curtis uses some very powerful statistical methodologies to pull those data sets together to arrive at the story that is told in the Report.

Sandy thanked Curtis for his presentation and work.

Curtis ended by saying that Mike collects stellar data; it is some of the best data that he sees. Curtis said we are very lucky to have Mike on our staff.

#### **Treasurer's Report** – *Treasurer Malcolm Poole*

Malcolm said that we have about \$200,000 in surplus funds thanks to the government. Malcolm reported that our asset to liability ratio is approximately 7:1, which means we are a very strong organization. Malcolm said he and Will are discussing how we should spend the surplus \$200,000, and that so far they are considering paying off Cathy's retirement package and saving some for a move to a new office. Malcolm and Will will bring a proposal for how to use these funds to a future board meeting.

Howard asked if there is a regular time for the board to discuss these kinds of financials. Malcolm said there are opportunities for discussion. Howard asked if our finances are broadly a challenge or a burden. Malcolm said that our finances are in good shape, and our main challenge is making sure our donors keep donating.

#### **Action Item** – *Board Consent Package (minutes and financials)*

Motion by Seb, seconded by Bud, to accept the consent agenda as written. PASSED

#### **Action Item** – *Nomination of Megan Hallett to Board of Directors*

Sandy said he is excited to nominate Megan Hallett to the board. Megan brings a passion for the Bay and a background in business management. Malcolm also expressed his enthusiasm for Megan joining the board.

Megan shared that she has always been by the water; her parents even joke she was conceived on the water. Casco Bay is her home, and she feels lucky to both socialize and do business here. Megan went to business school at Southern Maine Community College while she worked at her family's business, Hallett Canvas and Sails. She is excited to join the board.

The board voted in favor of electing Megan Hallett to the board of Friends of Casco Bay.

#### **Interim Director and Diversity Training Update** – *Interim Director Will Everitt*

Will said we had great year-end giving. He is excited that Susan Bosco has joined our staff. Will said he is very proud of our staff, they are doing great work. For example, the most recent Casco Bay Matters event may be the best online event we have done to date.

Will said that our victory on the MS4 permit is now official! No one appealed the final permit. Stormwater is one of the greatest threats to the Bay and this is our biggest stormwater victory. Will said that we are working on communications about this victory that will be coming soon.

Will said we have been working with our controller, Peter Montano's firm and his staffer John Davidson. It has been going well, and so far they caught one typo in the interim financial report. We will continue working with them as we draft the FY23 budget.

Will announced that our Environmental Justice, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training will be held on Tuesday, February 8 from 3-7 p.m. via Zoom (this information was also sent to board members via email). Will thanked Pat, Deb, and Sandy, and Robby and Sarah for their work to make this training happen. This training is essentially a mini retreat for the board, and represents an opportunity to discuss what it means to work for everyone around the Bay. Will also expressed his gratitude for the current racial, gender, and age diversity on the board. Will said he looks forward to us considering our work in the context of a changing Casco Bay community. He thinks that our mission will not change, but that we will work at a deeper level to protect our waters for all those in this generation and the generations to come.

#### **Search Committee Update – *Committee Co-Chairs Sandy Marsters and Seb Milardo***

Seb said that there have been 13 applicants for the Executive Director position. About half of those met the committee's criteria and have been interviewed. Seb said two more interviews are coming up this week. By next week, the committee will decide which candidates they want to recommend for a staff interview. After staff approves a candidate, the candidate will be interviewed by the board. Seb said it has been a complex hiring process. Seb said the committee is pleased with where we are at, and thanked Will for being a part of the interviews so far.

#### **Science Update on our Seasonal Sampling and Q&A – *Staff Scientist Mike Doan***

Mike expressed his gratitude for Curtis's presentation, noting that the CBEP is so important to our work. Mike reviewed our data collection programs; our seasonal program and our continuous program. Our seasonal program has been going for 29 years, where we go out about twice a month between May and Oct to collect data. Meanwhile, our Continuous Program has been running since 2016 and collects data year round.

Mike showed a graph of our seasonal sampling data on temperature for the past 29 years, showing that water temperatures in Casco Bay are increasing at approximately 1°F per decade. Sandy asked if this trend will keep going at the same rate. Mike said he thinks it may get even steeper, and that at this point there is not much that can be done to change the trend.

Mike said the Continuous Monitoring Station program is still going well, and that he is always working to be more efficient at switching out the stations. Mike said he is working with the University of New Hampshire to analyze our pH data. Mike said UNH has great scientists, and that this is a big deal. Lastly, Mike said that he is revamping our Quality Assurance Plan. The Plan needs to be renewed every five years and allows us to share our data with the Department of Environmental Protection, and even use it in

court if we ever need to. The Plan has become a big document over the years, and Mike is working to make it simpler. Mike closed his update by suggesting everyone look at the CBEP State of the Bay Report.

Will reflected that it is good to hear that our Continuous Monitoring Station and seasonal data are important to Curtis and CBEP. Will also noted that the Quality Assurance Plan is the probably the wonkiest aspect of our science work, but that it is hugely important. When we advocate for policy based on our data, the Plan makes the data rock solid, where no one can argue its credibility.

Sandy said that tonight we got a sense of how robust our work is, the influence we have, and that it is all very impressive. Sandy closed by welcoming Megan and Susan to Friends of Casco Bay.

Malcolm saluted Will for his work as Interim Director thus far.

Sandy adjourned the meeting at 6:55 p.m.