

# Friends of Casco Bay

## Strategic Plan 2023-2028

### Our Mission

Friends of Casco Bay improves and protects the environmental health of Casco Bay.

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### How We Meet Our Mission

Friends of Casco Bay uses an integrated approach to tackle the largest threats to the health of the Bay. As home to the Casco Baykeeper, we act as the eyes, ears, and voice of the Bay. We meet our mission through science, advocacy, and community engagement. Through our Science Program, we collect data and observations on our waters and put these data in context to other research being done in the Bay. Our Baykeeping Program is guided both by this science and community input as we advocate for — and build partnerships for — clean water. Through our engagement efforts, we encourage stewardship and provide meaningful ways for community members to take part in protecting the health of the Bay.

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### Our Vision

By 2028, Casco Bay, through extensive community outreach and engagement, is familiar to a larger and more diverse audience both near shore and in the watershed. We are encouraging people to get outside to enjoy the Bay, building stronger attachments to it. Community members are eager to help protect the waters they call home. Communities in the watershed are more familiar with our work to keep the Bay as clean and productive as possible.

Friends of Casco Bay is taking a holistic view of the health of the Bay. Casco Bay connects the rivers that flow into it to the greater Gulf of Maine. These waters are for many a source of inspiration and solace. They are home to countless sea life above and below the water. They are also a major contributor to the economic vitality of our region.

The largest threat to the health of the Bay is climate change, the long-term shift in temperatures and weather patterns caused by the burning of fossil fuels. These changes are leading to acidifying waters, higher water temperatures, and rising seas. In addition, land-based activities are leading to coastal acidification, excess nitrogen, and stormwater pollution.

Collaborating with our many partners, we continue to improve the scientific methods that help us better understand the state of the Bay and more effectively respond to these threats and to emerging needs of the Bay. We are a widely recognized leader in the field of marine water monitoring, and we share our data and expertise with others.

Respect at the local, state, and national levels for the quality of our science allows our Casco Baykeeper to advocate effectively for permits and laws that protect and improve the quality of Casco Bay's marine water and of the many tributaries that feed the estuary.

We are more imaginative and nimble in how we offer ways for our many dedicated volunteers to become engaged in caring for the Bay. Community members recognize that they need to work locally while also addressing factors that are beyond the Bay's boundaries, such as supporting efforts to address the causes and consequences of climate change.

Our new offices reflect the changing nature of the workplace while offering our highly professional and experienced staff a comfortable, practical and safe environment to do their work. Our new and expanded lab reflects our commitment to improving our science work.

As unexpected threats to the Bay arise, Friends of Casco Bay has the flexibility, staffing, and support needed to assess problems, pivot, and seek solutions.

We continue to be a fiscally sound and responsible organization, working creatively within our means while remaining realistic about financial and demographic challenges that may occur.

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## **Our Purpose**

The purpose of Friends of Casco Bay is to be a leader in protecting the health of Casco Bay through sound science, advocacy, and by broadening support for clean water. We strive to protect and improve the health of the Bay and its tributaries for the benefit of a healthy ecosystem and for all those who live, work and play in the watershed now and for generations to come. We recognize that there are underserved and underrepresented populations in our watershed; we are applying an environmental justice lens to our efforts and working to diversify our board, staff, membership, and volunteer base. We increasingly recognize that problems — and solutions — to the Bay's health necessitate working with partners deeper into our watershed and up and down the coast. As climate change continues to affect the Bay and exacerbates existing threats to our coastal waters, we will work for solutions at the national, state, and local levels to address, mitigate, and adapt to looming changes.

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## **Our Values**

Friends of Casco Bay values clean marine water. A healthy Casco Bay is integral to the quality of all life in the region. Our work is based on science and objective facts. We value working with our community as we foster shared ownership and responsibility for the Bay. We conduct our work ethically, with credibility, honesty, and integrity. We are proactive and pragmatic, striving for positive outcomes. We adjust and adapt as appropriate in changing circumstances.

### **1. Goal: we will track changing conditions and respond to climate change to maintain the health and resiliency of Casco Bay and its watershed.**

- We recognize that climate change will continue to affect our waters. We will continue working on climate change at the local, state, and national levels. We will advocate for solutions to the causes and consequences of climate change.
- This work will include climate mitigation — advocacy to reduce greenhouse gases and increase green energy production — and climate adaptation — support for how to address rising seas, warming waters, and other looming changes.
- As part of our work to decrease dependence on fossil fuels and to protect the Bay, we will advocate for the responsible development of alternative energy sources, including offshore wind.
- We will continue collecting data on how the Bay is changing, and communicate those changes to the public and to strategic partners.
- We will adapt our work, strategies, and partners to respond to this existential threat.

### **2. Goal: To reduce pollution into the Bay and protect water quality, we will continue work to address stormwater pollution, excess nitrogen, sewage overflows, and other major threats that emerge as we monitor the health of Casco Bay.**

- We will work to reduce this pollution through advocacy to enforce and tighten Clean Water Act permits, improving state laws and regulations, and by working at the local level with municipal partners.
- We will work with partners in the region to engage and educate the public on better land-use practices.
- We will track emerging issues and issues including PFAS, increased development, aquaculture siting, and marine debris/microplastics.
- We will expect the unexpected. We will respond to community concerns and new threats to the Bay's health. This may include collecting new types/parameters of data on the health of the Bay and assessing new policy initiatives.

### **3. Goal: we will improve how we collect data and how we measure the health of Casco Bay.**

- We will continue to collect data on the health of the Bay and the rivers that flow into it by using Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Environmental Protection-approved quality assurance plans and proven technology. We will stay on top of changing technology and supply chain issues to ensure that we are collecting scientifically accurate data that track trends over time.
- In order to better understand the health of the Bay, we will work with partners to understand how our data fit in with others' research on eelgrass habitat, critical species, invasive species, and other vital environmental indicators. We will share our data readily with partners, decision-makers, researchers, and community members.
- We will use scientific data and observations — including our volunteers' and our partners' — in our advocacy efforts.

**4. Goal: To better meet our mission, we will expand our outreach and community engagement efforts and become more representative of the watershed.**

- We will expand our partnerships with river advocates in the watershed and with other coastal and marine-oriented organizations and agencies up and down Maine's coast.
- We will build new relationships with nontraditional allies and deepen our relationships with existing longtime partners.
- We will become more imaginative and creative in ways to engage people in our science, advocacy, and stewardship efforts. We will provide meaningful ways for people to engage in our mission, leverage volunteer strengths, and support policies that reduce pollution and increase climate resiliency.
- We will work to get the next generations involved in our efforts. This is crucial to maintaining our organization into the future.
- We will be open to new ways to work together, new partnerships, and mergers.
- We will conduct our work through the lenses of inclusion and environmental justice. We will work to ensure all members of the community, including those who have been historically marginalized, have a say in the decisions that affect the health of our waters.
- We will make our data accessible to the public through infographics, stories, and easy-to-understand analyses.
- We will regularly share relevant work, stories, data, and partnerships with traditional media and social media to expand the general public's understanding of issues that affect our waters and to provide meaningful ways people can get involved in our work. We will explore undertaking a watershed-wide marketing campaign.

**5. Goal: We will continue to evolve and grow the health of our organization.**

- We will maintain an even keel financially by sustainably growing our budget and keeping up with the cost of living. In addition to raising operating funds, we will identify a new, major fundraising campaign to help continue our financial sustainability.
- We will locate and move to new office space that meets the needs of our organization, including adequate laboratory space and workstations for all staff.
- Just as biodiversity is a sign of a healthy ecosystem, a diverse board, staff, and membership is a sign of organizational health. We will work on an intentional and continuous process to build a respectful and diverse organization.

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**Tracking Our Progress**

Our annual progress toward our strategic goals will be tracked in our annual operating plans. Given the nature of our work, some tracking will be narrative and qualitative. Other metrics, such as water quality data, financial and fundraising efforts, and volunteer hours are extremely specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound, are being tracked to help monitor our efforts over the next five years:

**Goal 1: Addressing the causes and consequences of climate change**

- Water quality conditions and trends
- Advocacy events, policy goals and achievements, including work on federal level, state climate action goals, and local level work: to what degree did we help mitigate climate change (carbon dioxide reductions, carbon storage, and green power initiatives) and to what degree did we help communities in the watershed and along the coast adapt to changes

## **Goal 2: Reducing stormwater, nitrogen pollution, and other threats**

- Data from our Science Program
- Data from state, local, and private sources
- Updates on Clean Water Act permits, rule changes, legislative action, ordinances, and other advocacy efforts.

## **Goal 3: Improving our data collection and technology**

- Updated quality assurance protocols
- New technology in Continuous Monitoring Stations
- Data analysis, charts, graphs
- Reports on accuracy of our data from partners

## **Goal 4: Expanding our outreach and community engagement**

- Current collaborations, alliances, and partnerships in watershed and along the coast, specifically noting new partnerships
- Volunteer metrics, including numbers of volunteers (new and returning), projects/programs, hours, data collected, observations recorded
- Online communication metrics, including website visits, social media engagements, email open rates
- Media stories generated, including outlet and date
- Attendance numbers and attendee evaluations of our events, including field trips, speaking engagements, annual meetings, film festivals, house parties, and community events
- Community engagement efforts, including programs, communications, calls to action, and their results

## **Goal 5: Evolving and Growing the Organization**

- Financial and development metrics, including revenues, expenses, assets and liabilities, numbers of donors by category (individual, corporate, foundation, government, nonprofit), fees for service (pumpout), giving pyramids, and financial and fundraising trends
- Demographic data on staff, board, volunteers, membership, and communities we serve
- New office space

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## **Closing Summation**

Friends of Casco Bay is working with communities along the coast as well as with partners throughout the watershed to reduce pollution and increase climate resiliency. We recognize that the cleaner the waters flowing into our coastal waters are, the healthier Casco Bay will be. Guided by science, environmental justice, and common decency, we are building partnerships and engaging the community in meaningful work that will benefit the environmental health of the Bay.