

**DRAFT**

# **CRITICAL NATURAL RESOURCES**

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## INTRODUCTION

Critical natural resources are integral to the environment. The purpose of this chapter is to help the City identify, manage and adequately protect its critical natural resources, and safeguard the local economy dependent on these resources. Note: for marine resources, see the Marine Resources Chapter; for water resources, see the Water Resources Chapter. Critical Natural Resources are defined by the State as those areas in the community comprised of one or more of the following:

- **Shoreland zone**
- **Multi-function wetlands:** *Wetlands found to provide three or more wetland functions as depicted on the Wetlands Characterization Maps developed by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife*
- **Essential Wildlife Habitats and Threatened, Endangered, and Special Concern Species:** *Occurrences as depicted on maps prepared by the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife pursuant to the Maine Endangered Species Act*
- **Significant wildlife habitat:** *As defined in 38 MRSA §480-B(10)*
- **Significant freshwater fisheries habitat**
- **Rare and exemplary natural communities, and rare plants:** *Occurrences as determined by the State's Natural Areas Program database*
- **Coastal sand dune systems:** *As defined in the Natural Resources Protection Act 38 MRSA §480-B(1)*
- **Beginning with Habitat Focus Areas of Ecological Significance:** *As identified by the Beginning with Habitat Program of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife*
- **Fragile mountain areas:** *As defined in 38 MRSA §480-B(3)*
- **Coastal bluffs and coastal landslide hazards:** *As depicted on maps prepared by the Maine Geological Survey*
- **Flood plains:** *As depicted on Federal Emergency Management Agency flood hazard identification maps*
- **Areas designated as a National Natural Landmark:** *Pursuant to the National Park Service's National Natural Landmark Program (36 Code of Federal Regulation, Section 62)*

## KEY ISSUES

Federal, State, and municipal regulations offer protection for most critical natural resources in Belfast, excluding large habitat blocks. Crucial to this protection, however, is ongoing monitoring to detect illegal activities and remediate where environmental damage has occurred. Funding at the Federal, State and municipal level is insufficient to ensure complete protection. Further regulatory protection at the municipal level may be warranted. Specifically, these areas within Belfast should be considered for additional protection through municipal regulation: areas with

steep slopes (see the map titled Topography), forested wetlands, and select wetlands under 10 acres in size that have limited regulation by the Maine DEP. However, the use of conservation easements or purchases may be more tenable to residents and voters than regulations. As important, easements and conservation purchases almost always result in permanent protection while municipal regulations are subject to future amendments or repeal.

The City's shoreland zoning ordinance provisions including waterfront districts are consistent with current State law and have been approved by the Maine DEP. The City specifically notes that it has worked cooperatively with the DEP to adopt shoreland regulations that vary from the state model regulations, including but not limited to the establishment of the Urban Residential Shoreland subdistrict, the Waterfront Development Shoreland subdistrict, the Stream Development Shoreland subdistrict and the Manufactured Housing Community Shoreland subdistrict. The above subdistricts better reflect existing development patterns in Belfast and are modeled on the premise that future development should be consistent with existing development. Also, Shoreland zoning districts of adjacent shorelands in the neighboring communities of Belmont, Morrill, Northport, Swanville and Waldo are consistent with Belfast's provisions for these border area shorelands.

## MANAGEMENT EFFORTS

The City can work with non-profit, local, state, and national advocacy groups to acquire property in critical areas for conservation outright or with easements. Specifically, the following areas should be considered for conservation:

- **Areas along the Passagassawakeag River**
- **Areas within the Water Districts watershed**
- **Areas along the bay**
- **Additional areas along the Little River**

Partners could include Audubon Society, Land for Maine's Future Program (Augusta), Maine Coast Heritage Trust (Topsham, Rockport), Natural Resources Council of Maine (Augusta), and Coastal Mountains Land Trust (Camden).

The City can educate residents on the value of critical natural resources through outreach programs, conservation committee efforts, and in cooperation with local schools. Programs could describe the existing resources found locally, threats from pollution, and ways in which residents can reduce their own household waste through reuse, recycling and proper disposal.

The Maine Farmland Trust and the Coastal Mountains Land Trust have sought the preservation of critical natural areas in and around Belfast, especially along ecologically sensitive water bodies and valuable wetland habitats. The City has worked with the Coastal Mountains Land Trust in the past on preservation projects.

## IMPORTANCE OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Protecting critical natural resources goes hand in hand with several of the key policies of the following chapters of this plan: Agriculture and Forestry, Economy, Land Use, Marine Resources, Recreation, and Water Resources. See those chapters for their specific policies and strategies. More generally, the protection of one resource, like water quality, often involves the protection of other resources that occupy the same geography, like natural habitats. Similarly, conserving wetlands, which absorb water runoff and attenuate flood flows, reduces the risk of flooding in already developed areas nearby.

In Belfast, the Rambur's Forktail (a dragonfly) and the Bald Eagle are the only identified Rare Animals, with a rating of Special Concern. The American Chestnut is the only identified Rare Plant, with a rating of Special Concern. The state identifies one of these trees on Route 1. Two more are found on Kaler Rd. Atlantic Salmon Spawning and Rearing Habitat are identified on the Passagassawakeag River near and between the Route 7/137 and the Doak Rd crossings. Belfast has no state-defined Focus Area of Ecological Significance, no state-identified significant freshwater fisheries habitat, no fragile mountain area, and no National Natural Landmark.

## SCENIC VIEWS

Scenic views in Belfast focus principally on Belfast Harbor and Bay, as seen from public streets and public parks and landings. Other scenic areas include the upper reaches of the Passagassawakeag River, the Goose River and Upper and Lower Mason Pond, the Little River, particularly the area near Route 1 and the area near Outer Congress Street, and the numerous open fields and wooded areas that border many of the rural roads in Belfast. See the map titled Scenic Resources Scenic resources of Belfast Harbor and Bay are noted in the Marine Resources chapter of this plan as well. The Gateway 1 plan includes a scenic resources map of views from Route 1; see the map titled Belfast Detail of Gateway 1 Scenic Quality Assessment Section Four (Upper Bay and River). In the 1997 Comprehensive Plan, these areas were rated for scenic value [1-9, the higher the number the more scenic]:

- City Park [9]
- Little River Dam and Little River, looking toward the Bay [6]
- Upper Little River Dam and Brook [7]
- Route 52, at junction with Prescott Road (Greenlow Corner), looking toward Belfast [7]
- Doak Road Bridge [5]
- Head of Tide [6]
- City Point to Upper High Street [7]
- Goose River, adjacent to Swan Lake Avenue [7]
- Goose River, adjacent to Route 1 [7]
- Armistice Bridge [7]
- City Landing [8]

- Lower Main Street toward the Bay [7]
- Hayford Hill Area [8]
- Kirby Lake [5]
- Patterson Hill [6]
- Upper and Lower Mason Ponds [N/A]

Additional sites of high scenic value include:

- Steamboat Landing
- Harbor Walk
- Belfast Rail Trail
- Heritage Park
- Bridge to the boathouse