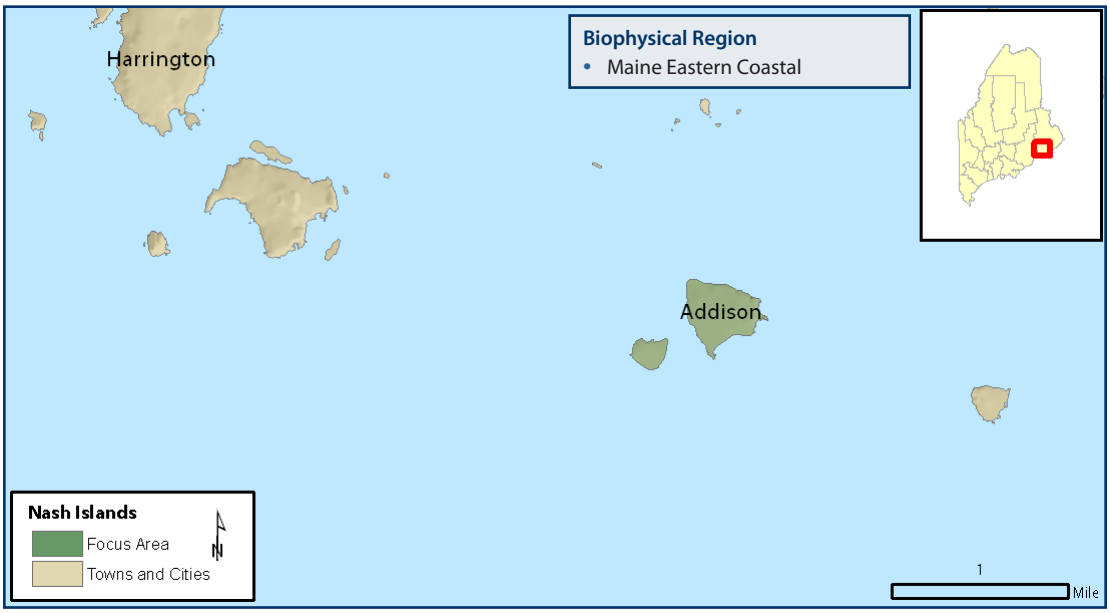
Beginning with HABITAT

Focus Areas of Statewide Ecological Significance

Nash Islands



WHY IS THIS AREA SIGNIFICANT?

The Nash Islands, located off of the town of Addison, are ecologically significant as they provide important habitat for nesting seabirds, including rare species such as Arctic and roseate terns. They offer wintering habitat for purple sandpipers, a species of greatest conservation need, and harlequin ducks, listed as Threatened. The mudflats, eelgrass beds and intertidal communities surrounding both islands support a diverse assemblage of tidal wading birds and waterfowl as well.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONSERVATION

» Educate residents about the ecological benefits provided by the focus area.
» Limit access to nesting areas during critical nesting periods.
» Protect sensitive natural features through careful management planning on conserved lands.
» Work with willing landowners to secure permanent conservation status for unprotected significant features in the focus area.

For more conservation opportunities, visit the Beginning with Habitat Online Toolbox: www.beginningwithhabitat.org/toolbox/about_toolbox.html.

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Rare Animals
Arctic Tern
Harlequin Duck
Roseate Tern

Rare Plants
Blinks

Significant Wildlife Habitats
Tidal Wading Bird and Waterfowl Habitat
Seabird Nesting Island

Public Access Opportunities
• Nash Island, USFWS

Big Nash Island, Maine Coast Heritage Trust

FOCUS AREA OVERVIEW

The 80-acre Big Nash Island and 20-acre Nash Island formerly supported nesting by roseate and Arctic terns. Nash Island currently supports a small number of nesting pairs of common terns and provides wintering habitat for more than 200 purple sandpipers and for harlequin ducks. The islands and adjacent open waters have also been mapped as important eelgrass beds, aquatic beds, and habitat for common eiders.

The rare blinks, a small plant known from only a few Downeast coastal headlands, was found on Nash Island in 1985. The island has not been re-visited to search for this plant since then.

CHARACTERISTIC SPECIES

Eelgrass beds, found around the islands, serve as nursery, habitat, and feeding areas for many fish, waterfowl, wading birds, invertebrates, and other wildlife, including commercially valuable fish and shellfish. Nash and Big Nash Island are designated as **Seabird Nesting Islands,** providing important nesting sites for many species of sea birds which touch down just once a year to breed, nest, and raise their young. The mudflats and eelgrass beds located between the islands have been mapped as important **Tidal Wading Bird and Waterfowl Habitat** as well. Seabird Nesting Islands, and Tidal Wading Bird and Waterfowl Habitat are defined as Significant Wildlife Habitats and are protected under the Natural Resources Protection Act.

Nash Island has also been mapped as Roseate Tern Essential Habitat and is protected under the Maine Endangered Species Act. **Roseate terns** (*Sterna dougallii*), listed as State and Federally Endangered, nest exclusively in marine environments on islands and barrier beaches. They breed from the Magdalen Islands south to Long Island in New York and they winter in South America from Columbia to Brazil.

Arctic terns *(Sterna paradisaea)*, have been documented nesting on both Big Nash and Nash Islands as well. Arctic terns, State Threatened, complete the longest annual bird migration known, a 15-20,000 mile round trip! Maine is at the southern edge of the species' range in eastern North America and here Arctic terns are found only on outer coastal islands, always in close association with other terns and other seabirds.

Harlequin ducks (*Histrionicus histrionicus*), a small diving sea duck, winters on the rough coastal waters and exposed rocky shores of the islands. They forage by diving into foaming surf

to glean marine invertebrates. Harlequin ducks, listed as State Threatened, are found in the northern hemisphere and winter on both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The Atlantic population has less than 15,000 harlequins and breeds in eastern Canada, Greenland, and Iceland. The birds that winter along the coast of eastern North America, including Maine, are primarily from a population of about 1,800 harlequins in southeastern Canada.

Blinks (*Montia fontana*) is a low, weak, densely tufted herb that grows in diffuse clumps. It has small opposite leaves and tiny, inconspicuous flowers that have 5 petals but only 2 sepals. The fruit is a shiny, black achene (single-seeded, dry, indehiscent fruit). Blinks occurs in small pools and seepy areas on coastal ledgy or peaty shores and islands. It flowers in the summer, senesces around August leaving a mass of decaying, mushy foliage with the shiny, black seeds scattered throughout it.

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CONSERVATION CONSIDERATIONS

- The presence of sheep and gulls on these islands currently limit their ability to support less common tern species like Arctic and roseate terns.
- Eelgrass is sensitive to losses due to disease, storms, pollution, nutrient enrichment, dredging, shellfishing, ice damage, propeller damage, sediments, runoff, jet skis, and inboard and outboard motors. Because of its important ecological functions, loss of eelgrass beds can result in reduced fish and wildlife populations, degraded water quality, and increased shoreline erosion.
- Harlequin ducks have extremely low reproductive potential compared to other waterfowl, and the North American population is especially susceptible to sources of adult mortality.
- Boaters and recreationists should not land on seabird nesting islands during the nesting season. If you are near a nesting colony of seabirds, watch them with binoculars and keep your distance (at least 100-yards). Repeated human disturbance can cause nest abandonment.
- This area includes Significant Wildlife Habitat for waterfowl and wading birds. Both land managers and private landowners should follow best management practices with respect to forestry activities in and around wetlands, shoreland areas, and Significant Wildlife Habitat. Maintaining wide forested buffers along all streams and wetlands will provide valuable riparian habitat for many wildlife species.
- If you are planning to build or conduct other regulated activities on Seabird Nesting Islands, Tidal Wading Bird and Waterfowl Habitats or other Significant Wildlife Habitat, contact your local DEP office for more information about the permit process so you can efficiently plan your activities and get advice about steps you can take to avoid impacts.
- Current projections suggest sea level will rise at least 2 feet in the next century due to changing climate and warming temperatures. As sea levels rise, coastal habitats will begin to migrate inland. In areas where this inland migration is blocked by development these habitats will be lost. Conservation of low-lying, undeveloped uplands where coastal marshes, beaches, and other intertidal natural communities can migrate inland with sea level rise should be promoted.

Ecological Services of the Focus Area

- Supports regional biodiversity by providing habitat for rare plants and animals.
- Supports eelgrass and associated eelgrass values.
- Provides important breeding, nesting and feeding habitat for seabirds and tidal wading birds and waterfowl as well as other species.

Economic Contributions of the Focus Area

- Contributes to recreational value of the area, including nearby coastal areas, by protecting water quality, fisheries, and wildlife habitat.

For more information about Focus Areas of Statewide Ecological Significance, including a list of Focus Areas and an explanation of selection criteria, visit **www.beginningwithhabitat.org**

RARE SPECIES AND EXEMPLARY NATURAL COMMUNITIES OF THE FOCUS AREA

	Common Name	Scientific Name	State Status*	State Rarity Rank	Global Rarity Rank
Animals	Arctic Tern	*Sterna paradisaea*	T	S2B	G5
	Harlequin Duck	*Histrionicus histrionicus*	T	S2S3N	G4
Plants	Blinks	*Montia fontana*	SC	S2	G5

State Status*

- E — Endangered: Rare and in danger of being lost from the state in the foreseeable future, or federally listed as Endangered.
- T — Threatened: Rare and, with further decline, could become endangered; or federally listed as Threatened.
- SC — Special Concern: Rare in Maine, based on available information, but not sufficiently rare to be Threatened or Endangered.

**State status rankings are not assigned to natural communities.*

State Rarity Rank

- S1 — Critically imperiled in Maine because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences or very few remaining individuals or acres).
- S2 — Imperiled in Maine because of rarity (6–20 occurrences or few remaining individuals or acres) or because of other factors making it vulnerable to further decline.
- S3 — Rare in Maine (on the order of 20–100 occurrences).
- S4 — Apparently secure in Maine.
- S5 — Demonstrably secure in Maine.

Global Rarity Rank

- G1 — Critically imperiled globally because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences or very few remaining individuals or acres) or because some aspect of its biology makes it especially vulnerable to extirpation.
- G2 — Globally imperiled because of rarity (6–20 occurrences or few remaining individuals or acres) or because of other factors making it vulnerable to further decline.
- G3 — Globally rare (on the order of 20–100 occurrences).
- G4 — Apparently secure globally.
- G5 — Demonstrably secure globally.