



## Shore and Harbor Planning Grants

### Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) & Manomet

*Protecting and improving shore access in Casco Bay (Fiscal Year 2023, project awarded 2022)*

*“The January 2024 storms caused unprecedented damage to many working waterfront properties, including the access points that harvesters use to get to the mudflats. In Georgetown, the two main access points to Sagadahoc Bay, where 85% of the clams harvested in Georgetown come from, were damaged. Both access points are on private property and had never before been documented. Because the access inventory had recently been conducted in Georgetown, the Shellfish Committee had the data needed to rapidly respond, including providing evidence of the importance of these sites to harvesters when applying for disaster relief funding to help the landowners repair the damaged property.” – Marissa McMahan, Georgetown shellfish committee member*



*Photo: Jessica Joyce*

## Project Description

The wild shellfish industry is typically the second largest fishery in the state of Maine by economic value and is an important part of many of Maine's coastal communities. However, shellfish harvesters are facing an increasing loss of access to intertidal mudflats where they make a living. This trend is driven largely by changing coastal property ownership and gentrification, which accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, and is part of a broader trend of dwindling working waterfront access.

Before identifying strategies to protect and improve access for shellfish harvesters, it is important to understand where harvesters are currently accessing the coast, where access has been lost, and where it might be a priority to acquire in the future. Manomet, with the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) acting as their fiscal host, worked with six towns in Casco Bay to collaboratively inventory their intertidal access points. Recognizing that inventorying is the first step towards protection, Manomet worked with each town to identify and pursue priority actions and opportunities to protect or enhance access after the inventories were completed.

Manomet partnered with the municipal shellfish programs in Brunswick, Harpswell, Georgetown, Yarmouth, Phippsburg, and Arrowsic. They also partnered with the Community Intertidal Data Portal team (Judy Colby-George, Jessica Joyce, and Madeline Tripp). Several others provided guidance and support throughout the project, including Jeremy Gabrielson (MCHT), Bill Zoellick and Pauline Angione (Gouldsboro Shore).



*Photo: Ross Donihue*

## Project Results

Manomet completed access inventories in the six partner towns. Within those towns, 66% of all identified access points were across private property, and the majority of these were informal agreements with landowners, underscoring the precarious nature of access to the coast. The vast majority (78%) of all identified access points were walk-in sites, often foot paths to the shore, followed by boat ramps, wharves, or marinas.

After the inventory, Manomet worked with each town to identify priority actions and opportunities to protect or enhance access. This included outreach to landowners, strategies to raise public awareness, and collaboration with land trusts to develop written access agreements. Manomet developed two final reports from this work--[a report that describes their work and findings in Casco Bay](#), and a [guidance document](#) to support other municipalities that want to undertake similar work. Both documents can be found on Manomet's [website](#). In addition, all of the public access points documented through this project have been added to the "[Shellfish Conservation and Management Map Viewer](#)" through the Community Intertidal Data Portal.

The final access inventories were shared with each town, but much of the data is confidential because it relates to sites on private property. The inventories will help the towns identify opportunities to protect/enhance access, and track how it changes in the future. The summary report and guidance document are intended to provide more information on this topic to other municipalities and organizations involved in the working waterfront across the state, and a roadmap for those who want to complete similar work.

## Future Plans

Coastal towns are interested in doing similar inventories and other efforts may start soon. However, coastal towns have are facing many challenges and successful completion of shellfishing access inventories may require some amount of technical assistance from an outside group. Manomet doesn't have any additional inventories planned, but will look for opportunities to support coastal towns in protecting and enhancing access for shellfish harvesters. They will continue to work with the towns involved in this project through the Casco Bay Regional Shellfish Working Group and the Coastal Access Strategy Exchange.

The Shore and Harbor Planning Grant allowed Manomet to engage more fully in conversations about working waterfronts statewide, and ensure that access for the wild clam fishery is a part of those discussions. They also got the opportunity to meet and build partnerships with others working on similar issues throughout the state.



*Photo: Emily Farr*



## Lessons Learned

Navigating timelines, processes, and expectations with six different towns could be challenging. Many of the lessons learned can be found in the final report and guidance document. A few important ones include:

- Having clear, written data ownership and use agreements is critical when gathering sensitive or confidential information about access across private property. Manomet developed written agreements with each town, and any time the data they gathered was shared with another entity (e.g., a local or regional land trust), they had all parties sign a written agreement. This ensures that access relationships won't be jeopardized by information being improperly shared.
- Access is very precarious across all the towns involved in the project. Even in towns that currently have good access, most of it is informal agreements across private property, which could change at any time. Finding ways to create more written or formal arrangements will be key moving forward.
- Having an inventory that has detailed information about access points in town is critical baseline information before unanticipated events. For example, several key access points were severely damaged during the January 2024 coastal storms. Having documentation about the importance of those access points was hugely helpful for the shellfish committee to seek out funding to help with repairs and build greater resilience into the future.

*Thanks to Emily Farr for helping to prepare this summary.*



*Photo: Melissa Britsch*

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