

DRAFT
Open Space Plan

Planning Board
Town of Chebeague Island, Maine

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Introduction

Open space, both on land and in the marine environment, is fundamental to Chebeague's maritime and rural character. Open space exists as beaches and rocky shorelines, scenic views, farmland, fields, forested habitat, wetlands, ball fields, and trails on the islands. Open space on Chebeague is not limited to the land, it also includes the waters of Chebeague which support recreational boating "trails", eel grass beds, scenic vistas, bird nesting sites, ecological habitats, and the islands and open waters of Casco Bay. Preserving open space within the Town of Chebeague is critical to maintaining the qualities that make the community attractive to residents and visitors alike.

As an island community, Chebeague's ties to the sea are an important part of its community identity, both economically and culturally. The Town of Chebeague Island encompasses approximately 15,700 acres, more than 80% of which are marine waters in Casco Bay. The land area of the Town of Chebeague is comprised of seventeen offshore islands – *Great Chebeague, Hope, Ministerial, Stave, Stockman, Bangs, Bates, Sand, Crow, West Brown Cow, Little Jewell, Goose Nest, Rogues, Broken Cove and Upper Green, and portions of Jewell Island and Little Chebeague Island*. The land area of Great Chebeague island about 1930 acres and it is the largest and only inhabited year-round island in the Town. Great Chebeague Island has about 350 year-round residents and is only accessible from the mainland by ferry or boat. The remaining 16 islands in the Town of Chebeague Island range from heavily developed seasonal compounds to rustic cabins to undeveloped wildlife preserves.

This Open Space plan has been developed by the Town's Planning Board to set a baseline from which the community can discuss and eventually implement actions to help preserve our open spaces, both on the land and in the waters that surround the islands in of the Town. The Town's actions related to Open Space preservation may include land acquisition, facilitation of easements and other land use designations such as Tree Growth Tax, identification of sensitive marine areas in need of protection and recommending changes to the Town's current land use ordinances.

Purpose of the Open Space Plan

The open space plan will provide a springboard for future initiatives aimed at the conservation of natural resources and preservation of recreational areas, shorefront access, and community character. The plan, drafted by the Planning Board, draws heavily on recommendations in the Town's Comprehensive Plan and input from community members. This Open Space Plan provides the basis for addressing the challenge of balancing growth with the desire to preserve community character.

Methodology

The follow steps were undertaken as part of this plan development

- Identifying and mapping critical natural resources, wildlife habitats and open spaces in the Town of Chebeague Island
- Developing and constructing an online GIS platform to display relevant land use information for the Town of Chebeague
- Updating the Town's open space resource inventory
- In August 2019, in coordination with Beginning with Habitat, we convened a public workshop to solicit input from the community on the importance of open space, suggested needs and priorities. Notes from the workshop are presented in Appendix A.

Future steps will include a public workshop, potential revisions to the Open Space Pan as a to incorporate feedback from the public workshop, distribution of the final plan to the public, and vote on the adoption of the Open Space Plan at a future Town Meeting.

What does Open Space mean to Chebeague Island?

A consistent and unifying thread for Island residents is the desire to preserve the rural character of Chebeague. What aspects of the Island are embodied by the term *rural character*?

- Access to the sandy beaches and rocky shores of the Island. In addition to a few public parcels, there has been a long tradition of public access to the shore for recreational and commercial use. Although many beaches are small, to date they have not been highly developed with docks or other structures helping to maintain a sense of beauty and isolation.
- Tracts of undeveloped fields and forests give the Island its rural sense. Although once a farming community, there are less than 10 acres of actively farmed land on the Island today. But like many other areas in Maine, some fields are still mowed and remain open, helping to preserve the sense of its historical farming landscape. Most of the remaining tracts of undeveloped land exist as densely forested tracts, especially in the center of the Island. These two land use patterns afford Island residents a mix of open space and forests that contribute to the Island's varied natural landscape and sense of identity.
- Many Islanders cite access to trails and footpaths that crisscross the Island as an important part of recreational open space on the Island. Not unlike Acadia National Park, these trails include diverse habitats including on trails along the rocky shore, along open fields and in the heavily wooded sections of the Island, providing a diversity of experience on our relatively small island.
- Spectacular scenic views can be found at many locations on the Island. These views are numerous and varied whether it's a sunset at the Hook, waves crashing on the rocks at Deer Point, taking in the view across open fields to the ocean, or watching the birds and progression of fall color in pockets of wetlands along the shore and inland. In almost all cases, the most treasured and iconic views on Chebeague are of the undeveloped natural landscape including the marine environment and the offshore islands.
- Inherent in the Island's definition and concern for the protection of Open Space is the protection of its groundwater aquifer. Although much of Chebeague's appeal comes from its natural beauty and separateness from the mainland, the Island is also especially vulnerable to the impacts of development. Chebeague is served by a sole source aquifer, and protection of the groundwater on Chebeague is vital to its future. Islanders recognize this and have always ranked protection of the aquifer extremely high on their list of land use priorities and link that protection to limiting development and/or actively protecting aquifer recharge areas.
- Protection of land-based ecological habitats, such as fields, forest, wetlands and vernal pools, is critical to maintaining the ecological health and sustainability of the Town.

- Chebeague's maritime heritage has encouraged many in the community to develop a keen awareness - and protectiveness - of the marine ecosystem that surrounds Great Chebeague and its offshore islands. The landscape and natural beauty of Chebeague have helped to attract residents with an appreciation of these qualities and their importance to the community.

In summary, it is Chebeague's scenic views, access to the shore, fields and woodlands, trails and footpaths and ocean environment, that provide its unique sense of place and identity as a community. Although the community places a high value on these features, many will be lost unless efforts are made to protect and preserve them.

Current Open Space Inventory

Table 1 is a summary of current open space that has some form of protection or public ownership. As can be seen on Table 1 these features fall into four main categories:

- Islands
- Beaches and shorefront
- Inland parcels on Great Chebeague Island
- Town-owned property on Great Chebeague Island

As shown on Table 1 five islands within the town boundaries are protected by easement or state ownership. The islands range in size from 55 acres to a little over an acre in size. In addition, portions of two islands, Little Chebeague Island and Jewell Island, both owned by the State of Maine, are located within the town boundaries. These islands represent important scenic and recreational resources, as well as critical seabird nesting and wildlife habitat. The remainder of the conserved sites on Table 1 are located on Great Chebeague Island. These include four beach/shorefront sites and eight interior parcels or trails on Chebeague Island. These protected sites comprise a total of 120 acres on Great Chebeague, or about 6% of the land area of the island. As can be seen on Table 1, the Chebeague Cumberland Land Trust (CCLT) is an important partner in these preservation efforts.

Table 1- Inventory of Protected Open Space as of April 2021

Protected or State-owned or Town Owned

Type	Description	Ownership	Conservation status	Acres
Islands	Stockman Island	CCLT	CCLT easement	16
	Ministerial Island	Private	CCLT easement	14
	Crow Island	Maine Parks and Lands		2.3
	Bangs Island	Maine Parks and Lands		55
	West Brown Cow Islands	Maine IFW		1.3
	Little Chebeague Island (partial)	Maine Parks and Lands	cannot be developed ?	22 (70 total)
	Jewel Island (partial)	Maine Parks and Lands	cannot be developed ?	21 (105 Total)
Beach/Shore	Chandlers Cove Beach/Field	Town	cannot be developed ?	10
	Indian Point	Private	CCLT easement	25
	Rose Point Beach/Marsh	Private	CCLT easement	7
	Deer Point	Private	CCLT easement	13
Interior/Wetland	Littlefield Woods	CCLT	CCLT easement	24
	Curit Property	Town	CCLT easement	8.2
	Belvin burial ground	Private	CCLT easement	8.5
	Sanfords Pond	CCLT	CCLT easement	1.8
	Chandler Preserve	CCLT	CCLT easement	9.6
	Higgins Farm	Private	CCLT easement	13
	Gray Path	Private	CCLT easement	1.2
	Hamilton Durgin Woods	Private	CCLT easement	3.3
Town-owned Property	Waldo Point	Town	cannot be developed ?	
	Curit Parcel	Town		
	Sunset Parcel	Town		
	North Road Parcel	Town		

Priorities for Open Space Preservation

Guiding principles for open space protection in the Town of Chebeague Island include:

- Preservation of open space for future generations to enjoy.
- Preservation of the island's water resources.
- Preservation and stewardship of important natural areas both on land and in the marine environment.
- Preservation of Chebeague's community character and maritime heritage.
- Collaboration with partners including the CCLT, Casco Bay Trust and other conservation organizations.
- Enhancing public awareness about the benefits derived from Chebeague Island's diverse natural areas.
- Developing a strategy for prioritizing, protecting, acquiring and managing additional open spaces which are considered important in the long term to Chebeague Island residents.
- Protecting cultural landscape patterns, such as walkable shore access trails, rural farm fields edged by stone walls, and "village" streetscapes.
- Exploring methods to protect and preserving marine "open space" which has cultural, ecological, and economic benefits.

Strategies for Implementation of the Open Space Plan

1. Protect Existing Town-owned and State-owned property
 - Determine status of protections on both town and state-owned properties.
 - Develop or participate in management plans for public properties, including access, maintenance, user surveys, etc.
2. Prioritize new Acquisitions
 - Identify target areas in collaboration with partners.
 - Establish connections to parcels/ habitats.
 - Explore funding options.
 - Set up Town capital fund; consider land bank.
3. Update Town Ordinances
 - Update site plan and subdivision ordinances to encourage open space preservation and maintain rural character to the extent feasible.

- Adopt cluster development and conservation subdivisions.
 - Consider increased protections in resource protection district.
 - Inventory Town sand dunes and beaches.
4. Encourage preservation of privately owned land:
- Utilize state tax Programs
 - Tree Growth
 - Open Space protection programs
 - Farmland preservation programs
 - Working Waterfront preservation & enhancement programs

Resource Materials (maps & surveys)

Town of Chebeague Island Web-based GIS viewer :

<https://chebeague.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=5e7307c4de0c411d8c796c3056535cc6>

Town Appendix A: Definitions

Ecosystem: A natural system consisting of plants, animals and microorganisms in an area that function together with all of the non-living factors of the environment.

Elgrass: The one and only flowering plant of temperate zones that can grow in salt water. (*Zostera marina*). Sometimes people call it "grass wrack" because when its long slender leaves break off and wash up on shore, it forms the "wrack line" by which we judge where the high tide has been.

Freshwater wetland types:

- Open water wetlands are areas of water where there are no beds of emergent, submerged or floating vegetation.
- Emergent wetlands are characterized by rooted herbaceous and grass like plants which stand erect above the water or ground surface.
- Shrub-scrub wetlands are dominated by shrubs and tree saplings less than 20 feet in height.
- Forested wetlands are dominated by trees taller than 20 feet in height.

Habitat for wildlife: the extent to which a wetland serves as habitat for animals, birds, amphibians and fish typically associated with wetlands and their adjacent uplands; for migrating species; and for species dependent on wetlands at some stage in their life cycles.

Inter-tidal emergent vegetation: sedges, rushes and riparian shrubs and trees growing in the middle and upper intertidal zones

Nutrient absorption: the potential ability of a wetland to take up nutrients that enter the wetland from surrounding uplands and upstream areas and process them into other forms less dangerous to the quality of downstream resources and downstream water quality.

Open space: land in a predominantly undeveloped condition. It may be preserved or managed in order to maintain the natural, scenic, ecological, cultural, hydrological or geological properties of the land. In addition, while not strictly open space, the Plan includes areas that provide cultural, historic, and recreational resources that contribute to Chebeague Island's quality of place and are part of its seafaring and rural heritage.

Production export: the ability of a wetland to produce food for wildlife and export the organic detritus (decayed organic matter) that forms the base of the marine food chain. While coastal marshes obviously have great production export abilities, freshwater wetlands can also play significant roles in land and marine food chains.

Protected open space: property that is protected from development because it has a legal constraint on the property that limits its use to conservation purposes.

Permanently protected open space: property that has limited protection from development because it is owned by the government entity, a non-profit or an educational institution whose mission is to provide services to the community. These properties have varying forms of protection but no legal mechanisms in place to prevent a change in their use as open space in the future.

Sediment/toxicant retention: the potential ability of a wetland to trap and filter sediments and pollutants in runoff water from surrounding uplands and upstream areas.

Stewardship: The practice of carefully managing land use to insure natural systems are maintained or enhanced for future generations.

Vernal pool: A vernal pool or seasonal forest pool is a natural, temporary to semi- permanent body of water that typically fills during the spring or fall and is often dry during the summer.