

Casco Open Space Plan

Preserving our Woods, Waters,
and Open Spaces



ADOPTED 2026
CASCO, MAINE



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Welcome to Casco's 2026 Open Space Plan.

This plan reflects the community's shared commitment to protecting the woods, waters, trails, and scenic landscapes that define Casco's character and quality of life.

The plan provides a clear, actionable framework for conserving natural resources, expanding recreation opportunities, and stewarding the lands and waters that support Casco's long-term health, resilience, and vitality.

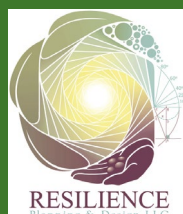
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Open Space Plan's creation was a collaborative effort initiated by the **Casco Open Space Commission**, whose members dedicated significant time and leadership to guiding the vision, engaging the community, and shaping priorities. The Town is also grateful for the partnership and technical expertise provided by **Loon Echo Land Trust**, who secured the funding from the Casco Bay Estuaries Partnership for this effort and provided professional expertise and support throughout. Loon Echo's longstanding conservation work in the region helped inform the overall strategy and the implementation actions. This effort was further strengthened by the contributions of numerous **Town boards and committees, volunteers, residents, and municipal staff** who shared their knowledge and perspectives throughout the process. The Town also appreciates the planning support of **Resilience Planning and Design**, who assisted with outreach, research and analysis, and the preparation of this document.

2025/2026 Casco Open Space Commission Members

Sam Brown, *Chair*
Mike Bolk
Eric Dibner
James Arsham
Courtney Walsh

Together, these partnerships reflect Casco's strong culture of stewardship and collaboration, and they form the foundation for carrying this plan forward into action.



Sunset in Casco
Photo Credit: Jules Pieri

INTRODUCTION



Photo Credit: Amy Brown



Photo Credit: Bill Phelps



Photo Credit: Carolyn VanAtta

PURPOSE

Casco's Open Space Plan (COSP) establishes a clear, coordinated framework for protecting, managing, and enhancing the town's forests, lakes, ponds, wetlands, trails, and other lands that define the community's character and quality of life. Its purpose is to translate community values into actionable strategies that further conserve water quality, sustain wildlife habitat, expand recreational access, and maintain the rural landscape that residents consistently identify as central to Casco's identity and their quality of life.

The COSP is intended to serve as a 10-year strategic blueprint and policy guide for conservation, recreation, and natural resource stewardship.

It identifies priority conservation areas, recommends improvements to trail and water access infrastructure, outlines stewardship practices, and provides practical steps for partnerships, funding, and long-term management. By organizing these actions within an implementation framework, the Plan helps the Town move from broad goals to measurable outcomes—ensuring that open space protection is proactive, strategic, and aligned with available resources. Casco's protected open spaces are as important along shorelines, ridgelines, and valleys as they are within and between its villages.

This Plan recognizes that open space is not only an environmental asset, but also a community health, economic, and resilience asset. These properties protect drinking water and watershed health, reduce flooding and heat impacts, support recreation and tourism, underpin the region's forestry economy, and contribute to the scenic and rural qualities that attract residents and visitors alike. As such, the COSP positions conservation and recreation, as well as access and connectivity of those networks, as foundational components of Casco's long-term sustainability.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

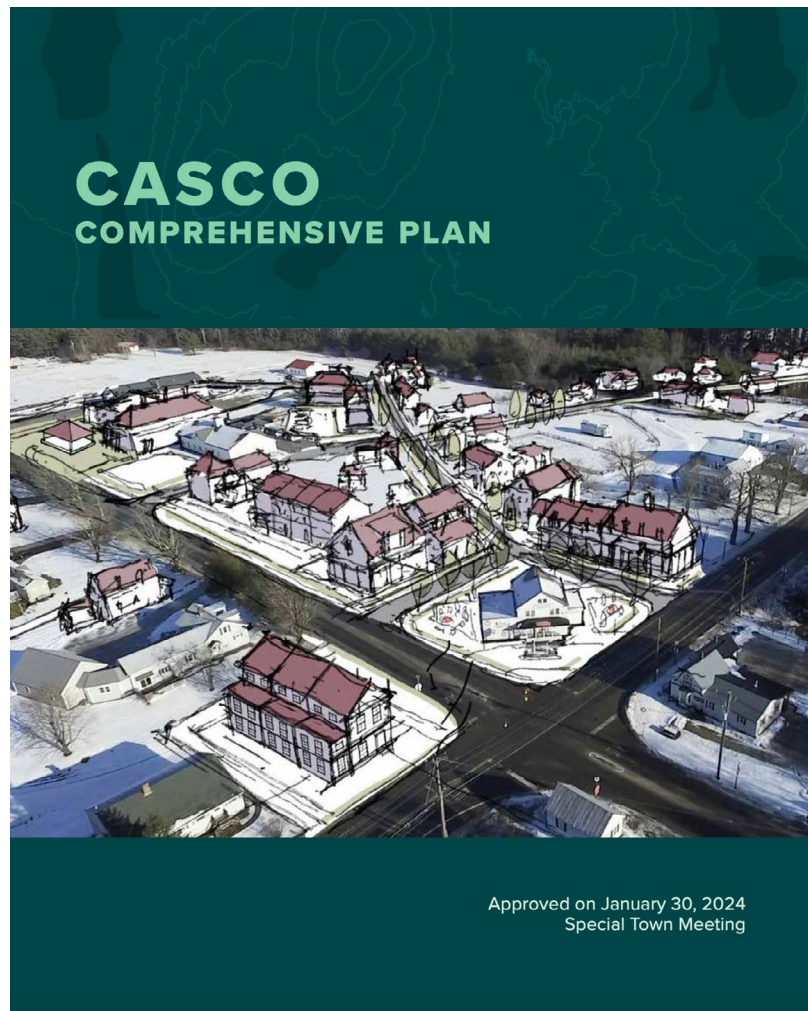
The COSP directly implements and advances the vision and policies established in the 2024 Casco Comprehensive Plan, which calls for preserving the town’s woods, waters, and open spaces while maintaining rural character and improving access to outdoor recreation.

While the Comprehensive Plan establishes broad policy direction and community goals, the COSP provides greater detail, technical analysis, and prioritized actions specific to land conservation, recreation infrastructure, and resource stewardship.

In this way, the COSP functions as a companion document to the Comprehensive Plan. It supports implementation of the Comprehensive Plan goals by:

- Identifying priority landscapes and watersheds for conservation and protection
- Expanding trail and water access connections between villages and natural areas
- Strengthening climate resilience through land and water protection and stewardship
- Identifying critical tools and partnerships to carry out these conservation and recreation projects

Together, the two plans ensure that Casco’s land use, natural resources, and recreation strategies are coordinated and mutually reinforcing.



RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER MUNICIPAL PLANS AND EFFORTS

The COSP also complements and informs other municipal initiatives, including:

- **Water Quality and Watershed Protection Efforts:** by protecting forest lands and supporting lake, pond, and shoreline protection priorities in collaboration with the Water Quality Committee, lake associations, and other entities protecting water resources.
- **Recreation and Community Programming:** by improving awareness, access, infrastructure, and maintenance of trails and facilities that encourage year-round outdoor activity in collaboration with the Casco Safe Streets Committee and others.
- **Land Use and Zoning Regulations:** by guiding decisions about where conservation or development limitations may be appropriate to protect sensitive resources and ensure connectivity for people and wildlife.
- **Capital Improvement Planning (CIP):** by identifying infrastructure investments such as trailheads, parking, wayfinding, water access points, strategic land purchases, and stewardship improvements that require funding and scheduling.
- **Regional and Nonprofit Partnerships:** by aligning local and regional priorities and collaborating with land trusts, conservation organizations, state agencies, and neighboring communities.

By coordinating with these related efforts, the COSP will ensure that conservation, recreation, and land management decisions are integrated into the Town's broader planning and budgeting processes rather than addressing them in isolation. It will support the implementation of the goals of the Comprehensive Plan, inform municipal decision-making and investments, and provide a shared framework for stewardship and partnership. Together, these tools help ensure that Casco's woods, waters, open spaces, and working lands remain protected, accessible, and resilient for generations to come.



PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process used to create this plan was structured into multiple phases over a year, with deliberate opportunities for community involvement and data analysis along the way:



EXISTING CONDITIONS ANALYSIS:

- Inventory and evaluation of Casco’s existing open space network, including forests, farmlands, conserved lands, parks, trails, waterbodies, and other natural resources.
- Preparation of a draft inventory of conserved lands, parks, and open spaces to establish baseline data for planning.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH:

- Completion of a broad series of engagement activities designed to gather input from residents about the value of open space, community priorities, and where future investments should be focused.
- Engagement included opportunities such as public meetings, surveys, a community photo contest, and other mechanisms that allow residents to share perspectives and inform plan direction.

PLAN DEVELOPMENT AND DRAFTING:

- Synthesis of inventory data, public input, and technical analysis into a formal Draft Open Space Plan document.
- Drafting included organization of goals, strategies, maps, and recommendations that reflect community priorities and resource conditions.

PUBLIC REVIEW AND FEEDBACK:

- Release of the Draft Plan for public review.
- Additional feedback is invited from residents and stakeholders, providing a final opportunity to refine the plan before adoption.

KEY PLANNING INPUTS

The COSP draws on several types of input to ensure it is grounded in local conditions and community values:



Baseline Data and Resource Inventories: A comprehensive inventory of Casco’s open spaces, including conserved lands, forests, trails, waterbodies, and other natural areas, provides the factual foundation for identifying conservation priorities.



Community Engagement Feedback: Resident perspectives on what makes Casco’s open spaces valuable—such as scenic beauty, water quality, outdoor recreation, and rural character—are collected through outreach, public meetings, surveys, and other engagement activities.



Alignment with the Other Plans: The COSP is developed in direct alignment with the goals and policies of the 2024 Casco Comprehensive Plan and the 2026 Water Quality Plan, ensuring consistency with broader community planning priorities for natural resource protection, water resources, land use, recreation, and quality of life.



Consultant Input: The Town’s consultant Resilience Planning and Design was retained to support this effort and provide the planning services necessary for the development of the COSP. They took the lead on inventory and analysis tasks, organized public outreach, provided meeting facilitation, and drafted this Plan in collaboration with the community. Their involvement brought technical planning expertise into the project.

This combination of technical analysis, resident feedback, and strategic alignment with existing municipal plans and policies ensures that the COSP is rooted in both community values and data-informed decision-making.

HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

The COSP is intended to function as a **practical decision-making and implementation tool** rather than a standalone document that sits on a shelf. Its primary uses will include:

Guiding Local Decision-Making:

The plan will inform land use decisions, town budgeting, municipal policies, and development proposals that have implications for natural resources, conserved lands, and recreational access.

Setting Conservation and Stewardship Priorities:

The plan identifies priority landscapes, ecological functions, and community-valued open spaces that warrant focused conservation attention, including voluntary land protection, easements, and stewardship agreements.

Framing Capital and Infrastructure Planning:

Casco's capital improvement planning (CIP) and investment strategies will be informed by the plan's recommendations on parking, trail infrastructure, water access points, wayfinding, other built elements that support recreation and connectivity, and strategic land conservation.

Supporting Grant and Funding Applications:

This locally adopted COSP strengthens applications for state, federal, and private conservation funding (e.g., Land for Maine's Future grants, federal recreation programs, watershed protection funds) by demonstrating community support and a strategic planning context for project funding.

Strengthening Intergovernmental and Organizational Partnerships:

The plan provides a shared framework that can be used to coordinate conservation and recreation efforts with the Casco Water Quality and Safe Streets Committees, regional land trusts, neighboring municipalities, watershed groups, schools, nonprofits, and volunteer organizations (such as the Crooked River Snowmobile Club and the Lake Region ATV Club).

Providing a Performance Baseline and Review Mechanism:

The plan establishes benchmarks and measurable objectives to monitor progress over time. Regular review (every 3 years) will support updates, reprioritization, and refinement based on new data and stakeholder input.

Educating Residents and Visitors:

Through clear priorities and articulated outcomes, the plan will help build public understanding of why open space matters, how it benefits health, environment, and local character, and how residents can engage in stewardship and recreation.

In essence, the COSP is designed to be a living tool that supports coordinated action across multiple fronts—resource protection, recreation access, community identity, and climate resilience—over a 10-year period. It is intended to shape local policy, investment, partnerships, and stewardship practices in ways that reflect community values and ensure that Casco's open spaces remain vital and resilient far into the future.

Photo Credit: Cordova Symanski

WHAT WE DID

INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

CONSERVED AND OPEN SPACE LANDS



Casco is defined by its abundant lakes, forested hills, scenic vistas, and rural character – features that make its open space network ecologically valuable and central to the community’s identity and quality of life. The town’s extensive waterways, rolling terrain, and mix of conserved and working lands create a strong foundation for recreation, wildlife habitat, and watershed protection.

An inventory of conserved and open space lands in Casco was completed to inform the COSP. It revealed that Casco contains a diverse mix of permanently protected natural areas, municipally owned properties, and privately held parcels with recreation and conservation value. Most conserved lands are in the southern and western parts of town with gaps in access and connectivity of the open space network elsewhere, particularly in the northeast.

OPEN SPACE

broadly refers to undeveloped public and private land and water offering scenic, natural, recreational, agricultural, forestry, or historic benefits. However, open space lands can be developed at any time, which would likely harm or reduce the benefits provided.

Ownership: *Open space lands can be publicly or privately owned.*

Level of Protection: *Open space lands have no legal agreement prohibiting future development.*

CONSERVED LAND

is property that has a legal agreement prohibiting future development by protecting its conservation values including water quality, wildlife habitat, recreational offerings, scenic views, agricultural or forestry resources, and more. They are one type of open space.

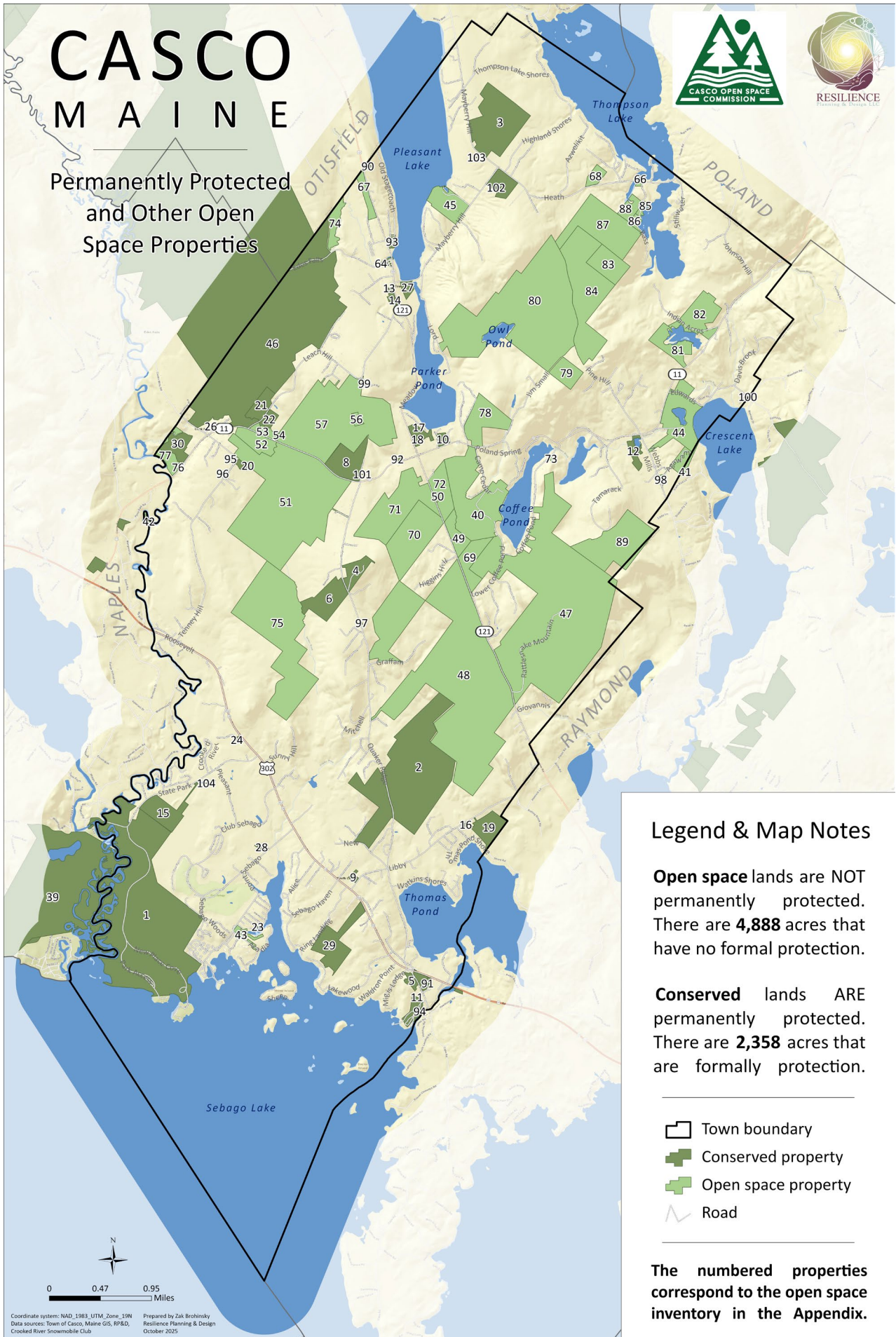
Ownership: *Conservation lands can be publicly or privately owned.*

Level of Protection: *Conservation lands are legally and permanently protected forever.*

The map on page 11 and table on page 12 illustrate the distribution of open space land in Casco, with permanently protected, or conserved land, identified.

CASCO MAINE

Permanently Protected
and Other Open
Space Properties



Legend & Map Notes

Open space lands are NOT permanently protected. There are **4,888** acres that have no formal protection.

Conserved lands ARE permanently protected. There are **2,358** acres that are formally protection.

- Town boundary
- Conserved property
- Open space property
- Road

The **numbered** properties correspond to the open space inventory in the Appendix.

Coordinate system: NAD_1983_UTM_Zone_19N
 Data sources: Town of Casco, Maine GIS, RP&D, Crooked River Snowmobile Club
 Prepared by Zak Brohinsky
 Resilience Planning & Design
 October 2025

Table 1: Open Space Network: Ownership by Category

Category	Properties	Acres
Municipal Properties	21	272
LELT (fee-owned and conservation easement)	7	722
State Park	1	651
School District	1	30
Water Access Points	9	n/a
Summer Camps	7	350
Hancock Lumber	29	3,617
Casco Timber Company	14	1,453
Cemeteries	22	13
Other	2	137
TOTAL	113	7,246

Disclaimer: Not all open space lands listed in this table are permanently protected. 4,888 acres of open space are NOT permanently protected in Casco. 2,358 acres are under permanent protection. These open space categories are displayed on the map on page 17.

PERMANENTLY CONSERVED LANDS

These few examples represent the diverse partners involved – including the State of Maine, private forestry companies, and non-profits – and represent the range of activities allowed on permanently conserved land. Among Casco’s most significant conservation achievements are the permanently protected lands that provide critical ecological functions, recreational benefits, and watershed protections. These properties represent long-term commitments to conservation through fee ownership or conservation easements, ensuring they will remain as natural (or mostly natural) landscapes in perpetuity. Some of Casco’s preeminent permanently conserved lands are outlined below.

Sebago Lake State Park anchors the southern portion of Casco’s open space network with 651 acres within town boundaries, part of a larger 1,231-acre park managed by the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands. The park offers formalized public access with beach facilities, a boat launch, hiking trails, and picnic areas, making it one of the region’s most popular destinations for both residents and tourists. Its location along Sebago Lake – Maine’s second-largest lake and a critical regional water supply – underscores the park’s importance for both recreation and watershed protection.



Above: Sebago Lake State Park

The **Jugtown Forest** represents a significant achievement in balancing sustainable forestry with public recreation. Hancock Lumber owns and manages approximately 650 acres within Casco as part of a larger 3,288-acre conserved block held under a conservation easement by the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands. This working forest demonstrates how active timber management can coexist with low-impact public recreation, offering miles of designated trails for hiking, ATV and snowmobile riding, and hunting. The broader Jugtown landscape spans roughly 5,000 acres across multiple towns including Naples, Raymond, and Otisfield, providing crucial habitat connectivity across the region.

Loon Echo Land Trust (LELT) has played a pivotal role in securing permanent protection for several key properties in Casco. The 398-acre **Rolfe Hill Conservation Area** stands as LELT's most recent major acquisition, permanently conserved in 2024 through a collaboration involving regional and state partners. This property features a mix of woodlands, wetlands, streams, and historic land associated with Casco's first homestead. Formalized public access supports a range of activities including hiking, dog walking, snowmobiling, ATV riding on club trails, hunting, and seasonal skiing. The emerging mountain bike trail development offers new recreational opportunities, and Rolfe Hill's central location makes it a potential anchor for enhanced trail connectivity throughout the region. Together with other LELT-protected lands, such as **Mayberry Hill Preserve and Hacker's Hill**, these properties represent significant community assets that provide public access, protect natural resources, and contribute to Casco's broader open space network.

Beyond these fee-owned properties, LELT holds conservation easements on four working farms—**Helen Allen Farm, Maplebrook Farm, Briar Sands, and Le Messurier**—totaling 156 acres. These easements protect agricultural and forest land while allowing the properties to remain in private ownership and active use, though most do not include formal public access provisions.



Above: Jugtown Forest



Above: Rolfe Hill Conservation Area

MUNICIPAL PROPERTIES

The Town of Casco owns 21 properties totaling 266 acres that serve a variety of recreational, civic, historical, and ecological functions. These municipal lands form the backbone of the town's publicly accessible open space network, and represent significant opportunities for enhanced recreation and community programming.

The **70-Acre Wood** stands as Casco's largest municipally owned natural area, offering hiking trails and informal parking for residents seeking quiet forest recreation. The property represents a future priority for improved access and trail development. Several other town-owned properties have been classified by the Casco Open Space Commission as "Conserve & Enhance" properties never to be sold. With investment from the Town and input from the local neighborhoods around them, these properties (State Park Road, Libby Road, Lilly Brook, and 70-Acre Wood) account for more than 170 acres and represent the most significant conservation and recreational opportunities that the Town has ultimate control over. These properties have already been identified for further evaluation regarding future public use and conservation enhancement.

The **Berry Property** exemplifies the town's forward-thinking approach to recreational planning. This 11-acre parcel sits behind the Public Safety complex with existing access to Parker Pond and is currently under active consideration as part of a broader effort to evaluate adjacent municipally owned lands.

The 2024 Comprehensive Plan illustrates conceptual opportunities such as improved waterfront access, community amenities, and trail connections, though no formal direction has yet been established. The property's potential to provide expanded neighborhood access and recreational programming makes it a key focus for future development and should integrate all municipal considerations including those of the COSP with the support of professional planning services.

Casco's active recreation infrastructure includes several well-utilized athletic fields and community gathering spaces. **Manning Field, Hancock Memorial Field, and Dingley Field**

all offer various ball fields and support youth recreational programming. Other properties including **Webb's Mills Park, Casco Village Green, and the Community Center area** offer other community and civic gathering spaces accessible throughout the year.



Above: A key municipal property that adds to Casco's open space network

WORKING FORESTS AND PRIVATE LANDS

Large privately owned forest parcels provide significant ecological connectivity and recreational opportunities throughout Casco. They also play a crucial role in maintaining forest blocks and providing in-tact canopy and wildlife habitat. However, the nature and permanence of public access varies considerably across these properties. These working landscapes represent some of the town's most extensive undeveloped acreage and play a crucial role in maintaining forest blocks, wildlife habitat, and traditional outdoor recreation.

Hancock Lumber maintains the largest private forest holdings in Casco with 29 parcels totaling approximately 3,598 acres. This

portfolio includes not only the permanently conserved **Jugtown Forest** but also the iconic 829-acre **Rattlesnake Mountain Wilderness**, which offers one of Casco's most popular four-season trail experiences, offering public access through a formal agreement.

At the heart of this property is **Rattlesnake Mountain**, reached by the **Bri-Mar Trail**, which originates in the neighboring town of Raymond and draws people across town lines to one of the area's most significant natural landmarks. This cross-municipal trail connection

reflects the broader recreational

and ecological role the property plays — the Rattlesnake Wilderness presents opportunities for habitat and trail connectivity within Casco and the larger network of undeveloped forestland. Its size, interior character, and position within the working forest landscape make it a significant piece of the region's conservation and outdoor recreation networks.”



Above: Rattlesnake Mountain Wilderness via Bri-Mar Trail

Casco Timber Company owns 14 parcels totaling 1,453 acres, anchored by the 501-acre **Pine Hill Wilderness**, also known as the **Owl Pond Wilderness**. This interior forest includes a network of hiking, ATV, and snowmobile trails, with public access primarily supported through existing club agreements and informal arrangements that require landowner permission.

At the center of this landscape sits **Owl Pond**, distinguished as the only pond in Casco without developed shoreline, offering natural wildlife habitat and a quiet setting for low-impact recreation. Because Pine Hill is largely surrounded by undeveloped forestland, it provides valuable habitat connectivity and supports high ecological integrity due to its distance from major roadways and intact canopy. The town, local partners, and other nearby property owners are actively exploring ways to formally protect the Pine Hill Wilderness and



Above: Owl Pond

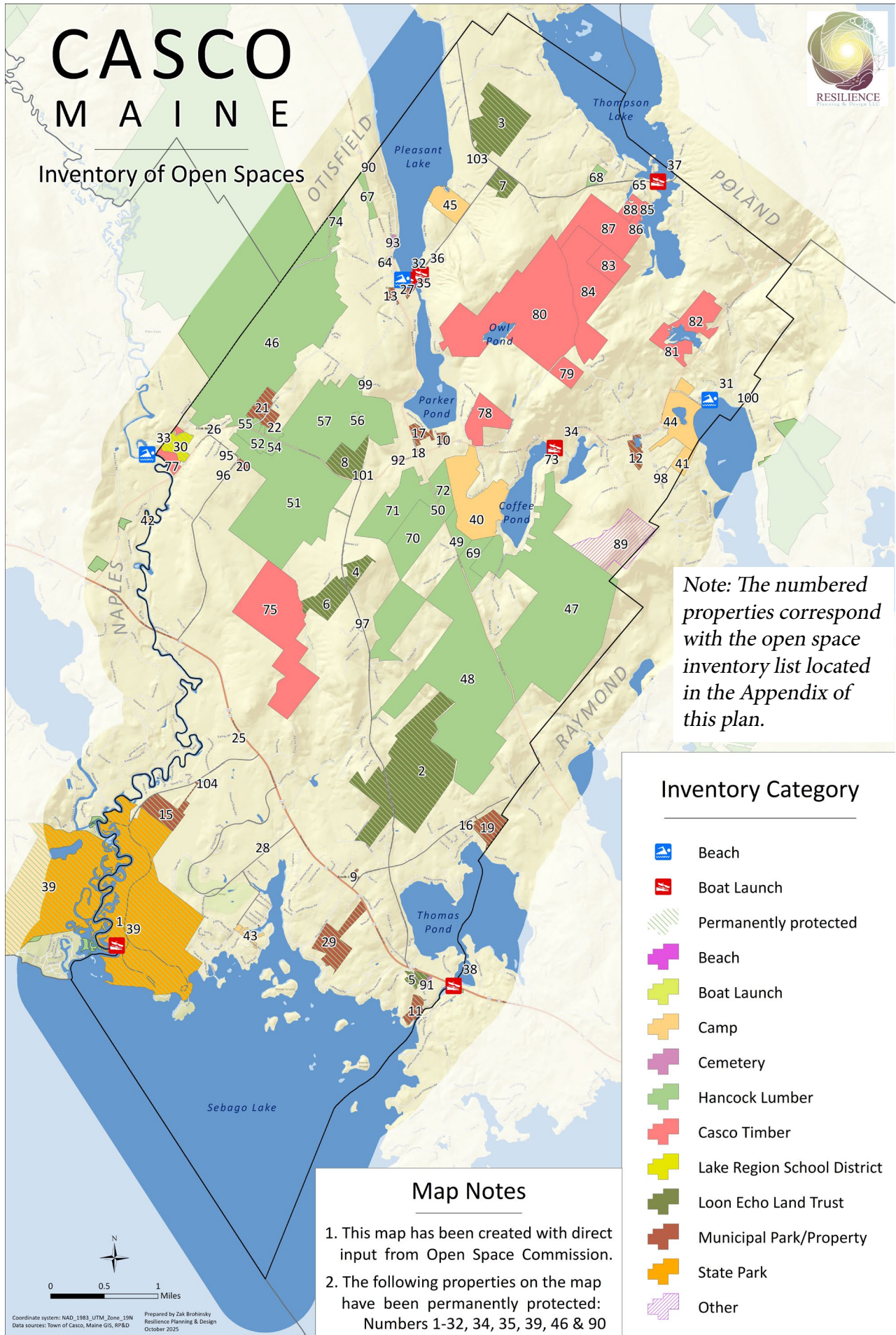
expand the footprint of the recreational network to include the entirety of Owl Pond, reflecting ongoing interest in long-term conservation and improved public access.

These working forest landscapes underscore both the opportunities and challenges inherent in Casco's open space system. While informal access arrangements have historically allowed public recreation on private lands, the lack of formal agreements creates uncertainty about long-term access. Trail users must respect private property boundaries and recognize that permitted and prohibited uses vary across these landscapes and may change over time as ownership or management priorities shift. **Formalizing access agreements** where possible, while respecting the operational needs of working forests, represents a key strategy for ensuring continued public benefit from these significant natural resources. Because of these challenges in maintaining access to these places, regional thinking and cooperation are critical as are formalizing what exists.

The map on page 17 illustrates the distribution of conserved and open space lands across different ownership categories:

CASCO MAINE

Inventory of Open Spaces



Note: The numbered properties correspond with the open space inventory list located in the Appendix of this plan.

Inventory Category

- Beach
- Boat Launch
- Permanently protected
- Beach
- Boat Launch
- Camp
- Cemetery
- Hancock Lumber
- Casco Timber
- Lake Region School District
- Loon Echo Land Trust
- Municipal Park/Property
- State Park
- Other

Map Notes

1. This map has been created with direct input from Open Space Commission.
2. The following properties on the map have been permanently protected: Numbers 1-32, 34, 35, 39, 46 & 90



Coordinate system: NAD_1983_UTM_Zone_19N
Data sources: Town of Casco, Maine GIS, RP&D
Prepared by Zak Brohinsky
Resilience Planning & Design
October 2025



RECREATIONAL NETWORK AND TRAIL ASSETS

Casco's trail network is a valuable and evolving part of the town's open space system, supporting recreation, health, outdoor education, and access to natural lands. Over 50 miles of recreational trails exist across a mix of private and public lands serving hikers, snowmobilers, ATV users, hunters, cross-country skiers, cyclists, and walkers. The map on page 19 illustrates the network of recreational trails, open spaces, and villages within Casco. However, significant challenges face this recreational network including a heavy reliance on informal agreements with property owners, maintenance and stewardship capacity limitations, a need for further delineation and management of both non-motorized and motorized trails, and the lack of a unified trail system connecting villages, schools, and conserved lands. Casco and the region have many dedicated user groups. The Casco Open Space Commission should be a conduit to formalize roles and responsibilities, as the town and region stand to benefit greatly from a cohesive and collaborative trail program.

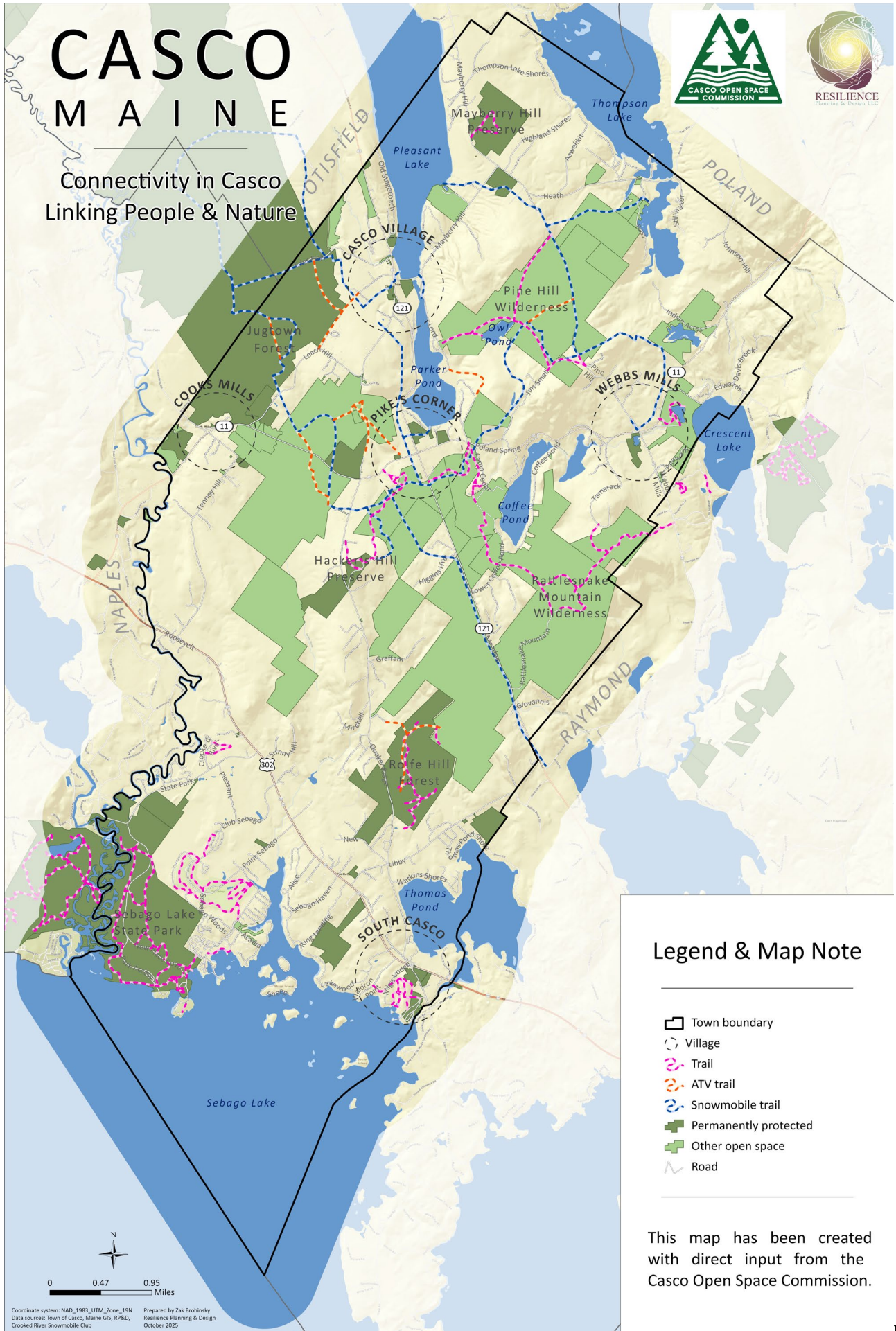
KEY TRAIL-ACCESSIBLE AREAS

Casco Village Complex

This 4-acre property in Casco Village sits along Route 121 near the connection between Pleasant Lake and Parker Pond. This property is seen as the heart of the Casco community considering the many offerings it possesses. In addition to traditional recreation assets including separate basketball and tennis courts, it also has passive recreational benches, an open field, and a gazebo that all double as gathering space for events including Casco Days. The property is also home to the Casco Community Center, which offers a variety of programs for all ages and interests. Lastly, the Casco Village Complex is a

CASCO MAINE

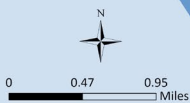
Connectivity in Casco
Linking People & Nature



Legend & Map Note

- Town boundary
- Village
- Trail
- ATV trail
- Snowmobile trail
- Permanently protected
- Other open space
- Road

This map has been created with direct input from the Casco Open Space Commission.



Coordinate system: NAD_1983_UTM_Zone_19N
 Data sources: Town of Casco, Maine GIS, RP&D, Crooked River Snowmobile Club
 Prepared by Zak Brohinsky
 Resilience Planning & Design
 October 2025

secondary civic hub where the public library and post office reside. While the existing trail network connects the Casco Village Complex property with the nearby Quaker Ridge area by way of Jugtown Forest and Leach Hill Road, opportunities to expand connectivity to this property could prove vital for actualizing Casco’s vision of a safe, accessible, and connected town.

Quaker Ridge

Occupying a large, mostly in-tact forested ridgeline between the villages of Pike’s Corner and Cooks Mills and to the south, this area features extensive wetlands, interior forest habitat, mature hemlock stands, and seasonal deer wintering areas. Residents use informal trail corridors for hiking, snowmobiling, and cross-country skiing, although signage is limited and access points are not well-marked. These types of recreational improvements have been noted for Quaker Ridge as well as other properties/areas including but not limited to 70-Acre Wood, the Berry Property, and The Heath.

Rolfe Hill Forest

Purchased by Loon Echo Land Trust (LELT) in 2024, Rolfe Hill has long been used by the residents and visitors to the region for hiking, snowshoeing, hunting, skiing, snowmobiling, and ATVing. At nearly 400 acres, the property quickly became one of LELT’s recreational focuses with a two-phased trail development plan. Starting in the fall of 2025, “a 0.7-mile downhill, intermediate level flow-tech [mountain bike] trail” began construction with the goal of being open to the public in the spring of 2026. The second phase of trail development hopes to begin in 2026 to include an additional 4.5 miles of mountain bike and pedestrian trails and will include “a 1-mile loop built to adaptive bike standards.” An expanded parking area is also part of the planned improvements.

While the community can expect the trail network within Rolfe Hill Forest to be extensive and accessible, the property’s location within Casco offers additional opportunities. As the southernmost permanently conserved property in a nearly contiguous block of over 2,600 open space acres, it could serve as a launch point for enhanced trail connectivity to 70-Acre Wood and the village of South Casco. Considering the investment in Rolfe Hill Forest, the property is a beacon for future recreation-based economic development in Casco.



Above: Mayberry Hill Preserve

TRAIL NETWORK ASSESSMENT AND CONNECTIVITY CHALLENGES

While Casco's trail network totals approximately 50 miles, it does not meet community expectations for a safe, accessible, and connected system. More critically, the network remains largely disconnected from key destinations residents want to reach, including village centers, schools, and public water access points.

This fragmentation is evident across Casco's five village areas. Pike's Corner in the central part of town contains substantial trail activity, serving as a hub for recreation with connections to neighboring communities. In stark contrast, Cooks Mills has virtually no trail infrastructure at all. Casco Village – the town's historic and civic center – and Webb's Mills have limited trail access despite their concentration of municipal facilities, businesses, and waterfront resources. South Casco maintains a small internal trail network, but it remains entirely isolated from the other villages, offering no safe off-road connections to neighboring communities or activity centers.

The disconnect extends to water access

as well. Several boat launches, beaches, and informal water access points identified in the inventory remain unconnected to any trail network, forcing residents to drive even short distances to reach public waterfronts.

This is particularly problematic for families with young children, older residents, and those without reliable transportation. For instance, the lack of safe pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure means that accessing Coffee Pond's boat launch from Webb's Mills, reaching Pleasant Lake Beach from Casco



Above: Coffee Pond

Village, or connecting Crescent Beach to nearby neighborhoods all require travel along roads that were

not designed with non-motorized users in mind.

Perhaps the most concerning gap involves access to the Crooked River Elementary School.

Located on the western stretch of Route 11, the school sits entirely removed from any trail network and lacks safe pedestrian or bicycle connections to Casco Village or Pikes Corner – between 2-4 miles away – or to surrounding neighborhoods. Students who wish to walk or bike to school, or families hoping to access the school's recreational facilities after hours, must navigate roads that have a history of high wildlife-vehicle collisions.



NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Casco’s natural landscape is defined by an abundance and diversity of water resources, extensive forested uplands, productive wetland systems, and the ecological connections that link these features across town boundaries and throughout the broader Sebago Lake region.

The town’s environmental assets—including major lakes and ponds, the Crooked River corridor, thousands of acres of contiguous forestland, and critical riparian buffers—provide essential ecosystem services that support water quality, wildlife habitat, climate resilience, and the economic vitality of Casco and the greater lakes region

Casco’s natural resources are not merely scenic amenities; they are functional infrastructure that filters stormwater, stores floodwaters, recharges groundwater, sequesters carbon, and maintains the drinking water supply for approximately 200,000 people downstream. Understanding and protecting these systems is central to Casco’s identity, its role in regional watershed health, and its ability to sustain growth while preserving the environmental quality that defines the community.

What are Riparian Buffers?

A **riparian buffer** is a vegetated strip of trees, shrubs, and grass planted along the edge of streams, lakes, or wetlands. Acting as a natural, protective barrier, it separates water from surrounding land uses (like farms or lawns) to improve water quality, prevent erosion, shade the water, and provide habitat for wildlife.



Above: Crescent Beach Riparian Buffer

Maine's Beginning with Habitat Program



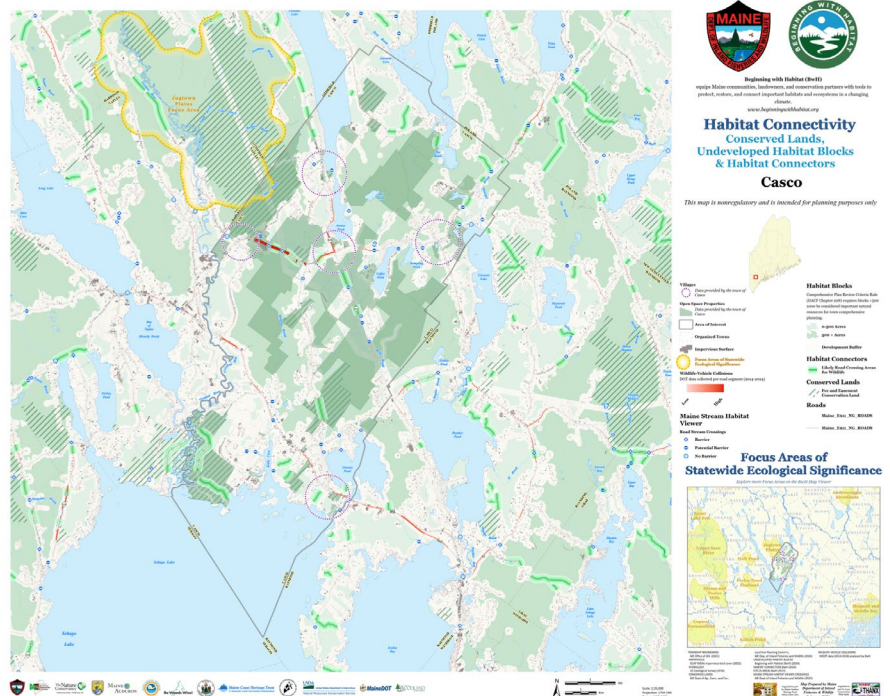
The natural resources and environmental factors presented in this section draw upon data and technical assistance provided by the **Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife's Beginning with Habitat (BwH) program**. Beginning with Habitat is a voluntary conservation technical assistance program that equips Maine communities, landowners, and conservation partners with tools to protect, restore, and connect important habitats and ecosystems in a changing climate. The program provides municipalities with natural resource inventories, GIS mapping, site-specific conservation strategies, and guidance on incorporating habitat protection into comprehensive planning and land use regulations. Through BwH, Casco has been provided a wealth of information on natural resources – all of which inform the town's COSP.

FORESTLANDS: THE FOUNDATION OF WATERSHED HEALTH

Casco's forested landscape is the ecological backbone of the town and serves as the primary natural infrastructure protecting water quality throughout the region. The town contains large tracts of **interior forest, working woodlands, and riparian corridors** that provide critical watershed services. These major forest blocks include the:

- Jugtown Forest complex (approximately 3,288 acres under conservation easement with roughly 650 acres in Casco),
- the Rattlesnake Mountain Wilderness (829 acres),
- Pine Hill Wilderness and Owl Pond area (501 acres),
- Sebago State Park (651 acres in Casco),
- Quaker Ridge, and
- other extensive Hancock Lumber and Casco Timber holdings that create landscape-scale connectivity throughout town.

The [Habitat Connectivity map](#), produced by the BwH program, shows, among other things, large habitat blocks.



Above: A small image of the Habitat Connectivity Map, created by the BwH program. The link to the left brings you to a full size image of the map.

Four HUC 12 locally designated watersheds make up Casco – Lower Crooked River, Panther Run, Thompson Lake, and Sebago Lake Watersheds – all of which have significant forestland within them.

These can be referenced in the map on page 25. These forested watersheds are essential to maintaining water quality through multiple ecological mechanisms. Forest canopy intercepts rainfall, slowing its descent and allowing gradual infiltration into soils rather than generating rapid surface runoff. Tree roots and understory vegetation stabilize slopes, preventing erosion and the transport of sediment and phosphorus into streams and lakes. Forest soils act as biological filters, capturing nutrients, processing pollutants, and recharging groundwater systems that feed springs, streams, and ponds throughout Casco. Shaded stream corridors maintain cooler water temperatures essential for coldwater fisheries, while riparian forests provide organic matter and habitat structure that support aquatic food webs. Forestland conservation has been widely recognized as a cost-effective strategy for protecting source water quality.

The Portland Water District, which manages the Sebago Lake water supply serving approximately 200,000 people (plus thousands of visitors), has consistently emphasized that intact, forested watersheds provide natural filtration services that would otherwise require hundreds of millions of dollars in built treatment infrastructure. Casco's forested uplands—particularly those draining to the Crooked River, Pleasant Lake, Thompson Lake, Thomas Pond, and other tributaries of the Sebago Lake and Androscoggin River watershed—directly contribute to the region's exceptionally high-quality drinking water.

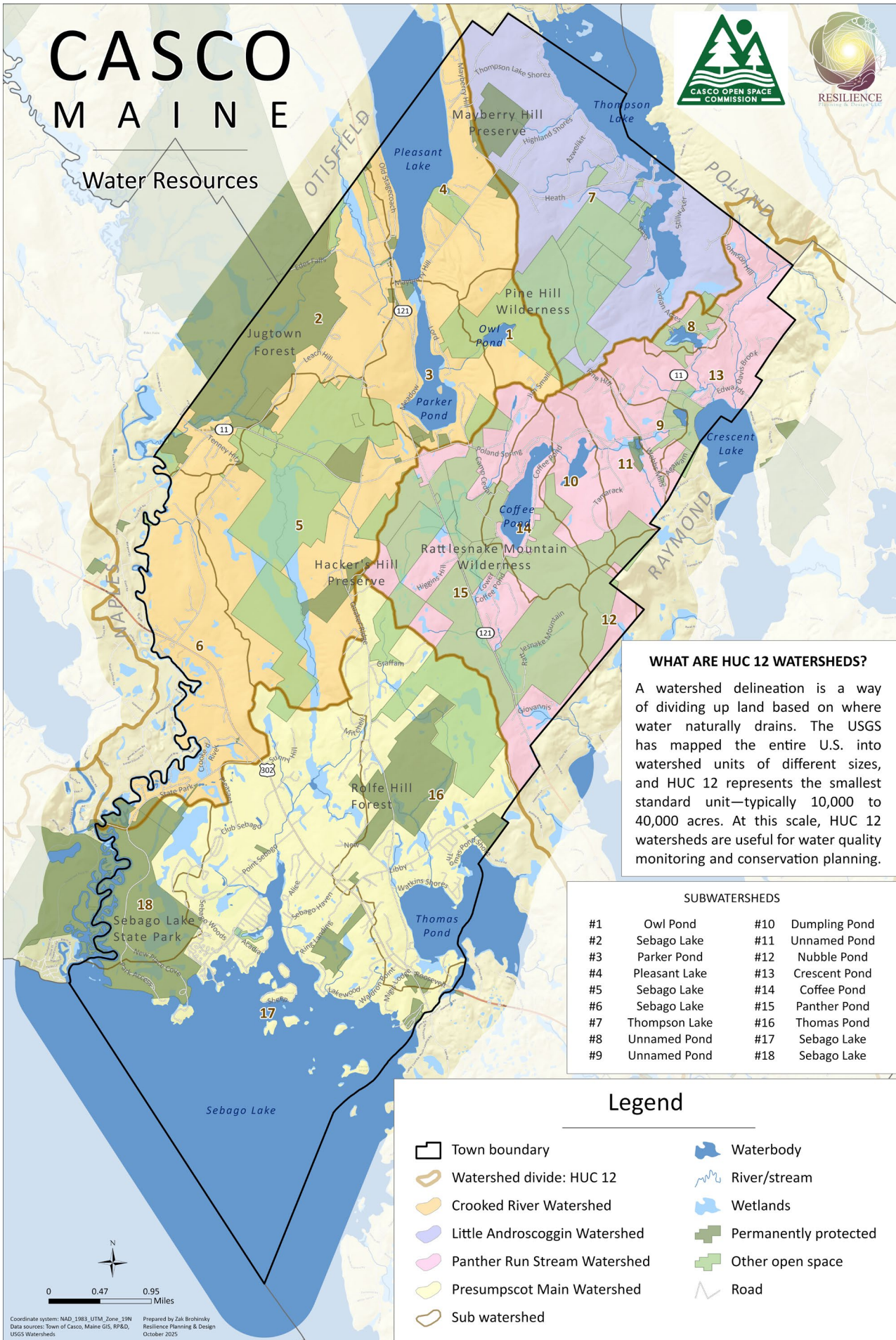
The economic value of this natural filtration capacity cannot be overstated. Forest conversion to development is known to increase contaminant loading and stormwater runoff, this threatens water quality in the Sebago Lake watershed. Maintaining forest cover, particularly in steep-slope areas, riparian corridors, and headwater zones, provides the long-term protection needed to sustain water quality.

Beyond water quality, Casco's forests provide essential habitat for wide-ranging wildlife including white-tailed deer, moose, black bear, bobcat, fisher, and numerous migratory bird species.



CASCO MAINE

Water Resources



WHAT ARE HUC 12 WATERSHEDS?

A watershed delineation is a way of dividing up land based on where water naturally drains. The USGS has mapped the entire U.S. into watershed units of different sizes, and HUC 12 represents the smallest standard unit—typically 10,000 to 40,000 acres. At this scale, HUC 12 watersheds are useful for water quality monitoring and conservation planning.

SUBWATERSHEDS

#1	Owl Pond	#10	Dumpling Pond
#2	Sebago Lake	#11	Unnamed Pond
#3	Parker Pond	#12	Nubble Pond
#4	Pleasant Lake	#13	Crescent Pond
#5	Sebago Lake	#14	Coffee Pond
#6	Sebago Lake	#15	Panther Pond
#7	Thompson Lake	#16	Thomas Pond
#8	Unnamed Pond	#17	Sebago Lake
#9	Unnamed Pond	#18	Sebago Lake

Legend

- Town boundary
- Waterbody
- Watershed divide: HUC 12
- River/stream
- Crooked River Watershed
- Wetlands
- Little Androscoggin Watershed
- Permanently protected
- Panther Run Stream Watershed
- Other open space
- Presumpscot Main Watershed
- Road
- Sub watershed

Coordinate system: NAD_1983_UTM_Zone_19N
 Data sources: Town of Casco, Maine GIS, RP&D, USGS Watersheds
 Prepared by Zak Brohinsky
 Resilience Planning & Design
 October 2025

Large, unfragmented forest blocks support interior forest birds such as wood thrush and scarlet tanager that cannot survive in smaller, fragmented patches. Vernal pools within forested wetlands provide critical breeding habitat for amphibians including spotted salamanders and wood frogs. The connectivity between Casco's forest blocks and those in neighboring Raymond, Naples, Otisfield, and Poland allows wildlife movement across the broader landscape, maintaining genetic diversity and population resilience.

Focus Areas of Statewide Ecological Significance represent rare species and habitat concentrations of statewide importance, delineated by biological rather than political boundaries. The Jugtown Plains Focus Area extends into Casco and overlaps with Harrison, Otisfield, and Naples, creating opportunities for coordinated regional conservation efforts. The map on page __ shows, among other things, the Jugtown Plains Focus Areas.

Community outreach conducted for the COSP consistently identified the continued protection of large forest blocks—particularly Jugtown Forest, Pine Hill Wilderness, Rattlesnake Mountain, and Quaker Ridge—as a top priority. *Residents emphasized that these forests define Casco's rural character.* Any opportunities to expand or connect protection levels within these would benefit the region and Casco's residents by supporting recreational opportunities, wildlife and ecological function, and providing timber and forest products that help sustain the local economy.

WATER RESOURCES AND WATERSHED SYSTEMS

Casco's water resources represent the defining feature of the town's natural environment and the primary driver of its identity, economy, and regional significance. The town contains **nine major waterbodies**:

- Coffee Pond,
- Crescent Lake,
- Dumpling Pond,
- Owl Pond,
- Parker Pond,
- Pleasant Lake,
- Thomas Pond,
- Thompson Lake,
- Crooked River, and
- a portion of Sebago Lake, Maine's second-largest lake and a regionally critical drinking water source.

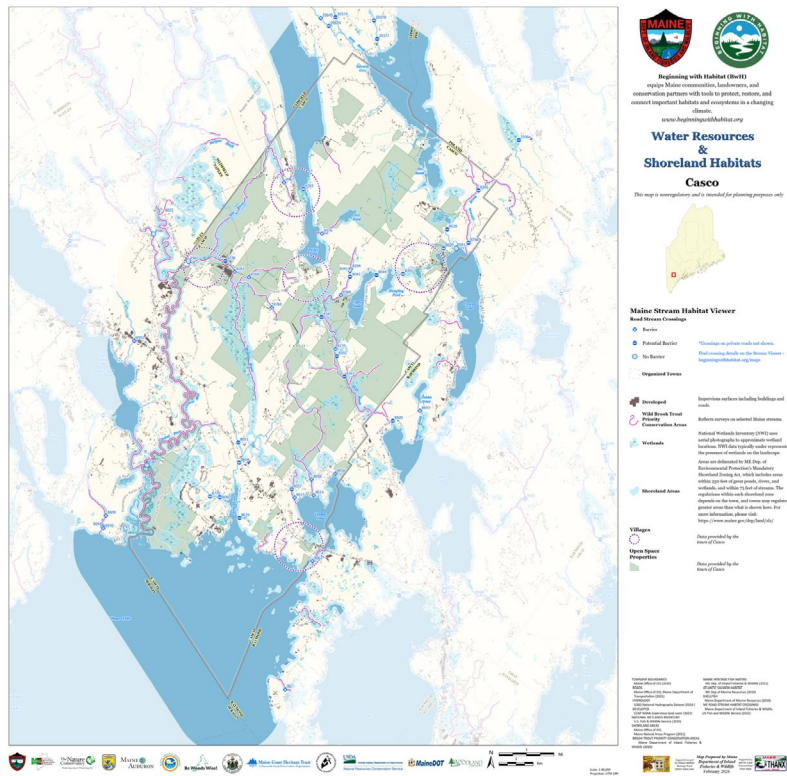
These waterbodies support coldwater fisheries, provide year-round recreation, sustain property values, and attract an estimated 60,000 visitors annually who contribute to Casco's tourism economy.

The [Water Resources and Shoreland Habitat map](#), produced by the BwH program, shows Casco's water resources.

The health of Casco's coldwater fisheries, particularly its brook trout populations, depends fundamentally on maintaining connectivity throughout stream and river networks. Brook trout require the ability to move freely through waterways to access cooler water refuges during warm periods, find new habitat during droughts, and reach critical spawning areas. Casco contains many priority brook trout conservation streams where protecting this connectivity is essential to population viability. However, infrastructure frequently interrupts these natural movement corridors.

Assessment of thirty-three public culverts in Casco found that thirteen form complete barriers to fish passage, eighteen create potential barriers depending on flow conditions, and only two allow unimpeded passage. Additionally, three impassable dams block aquatic connectivity in the town's waterways.

Water quality monitoring coordinated through active lake associations and county soil and water conservation districts provides essential baseline data. Results are then reported to Lake Stewards of Maine and tracked over time to identify trends, detect emerging problems, and evaluate the effectiveness of watershed protection efforts.



Above: A small image of the Water Resources and Shoreland Habitat Map, created by the BwH program. The link in the left-hand column brings you to a full size image of the map.



Community feedback gathered through the Open Space planning process consistently *identified water quality protection as the highest environmental priority*, with specific concerns raised about Pleasant Lake, Thompson Lake, Parker Pond, Thomas Pond, Crescent Lake, and the Crooked River. Residents emphasized the need for stronger shoreland protections, improved erosion control, better septic system oversight, and proactive land conservation to prevent degradation of the lakes and ponds that define Casco's character and economy.

Wetlands and Stream Corridors

Casco contains an extensive network of wetlands, stream corridors, and riparian areas that provide critical ecological functions often underappreciated relative to the more visible lakes and ponds. Wetland systems such as those around The Heath, the marsh areas near Webbs Mills, the wetlands behind the Hancock Mill on Route 11, and the numerous forested wetlands scattered throughout the Pine Hill, Jugtown, and Quaker Ridge landscapes serve as natural sponges that absorb and slowly release stormwater, reducing flood peaks and maintaining stream flows during dry periods.

These wetland complexes filter nutrients and sediments from runoff before they reach downstream lakes and streams, recharge groundwater systems that feed springs and maintain summer stream flows, and provide irreplaceable habitat for amphibians, waterfowl, wading birds, and numerous invertebrate species. Vernal pools – seasonal wetlands that fill in spring and dry by late summer – support specialized wildlife including wood frogs, spotted salamanders, and fairy shrimp.

Community feedback identified several wetland and stream areas as priorities for protection due to their vulnerability to development pressures, erosion, or climate impacts. The *wetlands draining to Pleasant Lake and Thompson Lake (The Heath)* were frequently mentioned as essential buffers protecting lake water quality. The *Crooked River corridor* was highlighted for its ecological importance, flood risk, and need for improved riparian protections. The extensive wetland systems in the *Pine Hill, Jugtown, and Quaker Ridge areas* were recognized as critical for maintaining habitat connectivity and filtering runoff before it reaches major waterbodies.

WILDLIFE HABITAT AND CONNECTIVITY

Plant and Animal Species

Casco's diverse landscape of forests, wetlands, lakes, and working lands supports a rich assemblage of wildlife species and provides essential habitat connectivity within the broader Lakes Region ecosystem. **Large mammals** including white-tailed deer, moose, black bear, and bobcat utilize the town's extensive

forest blocks, while **smaller mammals** such as fisher, mink, otter, beaver, and porcupine occupy a variety of habitats from dense woods to wetland edges and lakeshores.

The town's waterbodies and wetlands support **numerous bird species** including common loons, wood ducks, great blue herons (with a documented rookery in the Rattlesnake Mountain area), bald eagles, ospreys, and a diverse community of migratory waterfowl. Interior forests provide nesting habitat for species such as wood thrush, hermit thrush, ovenbird, scarlet tanager, and various warblers that require large, unfragmented forest patches to successfully reproduce. Wetlands and vernal pools support **amphibian populations** including spotted salamanders, wood frogs, spring peepers, and American toads.

Beginning with Habitat data identifies **several rare bird species** within Casco requiring special consideration. Great Blue Heron (State Special Concern) populations are declining due to nest site sensitivity. A documented nesting colony in a central Casco wetland requires protection from disturbance. Two rare damselfly species—Scarlet Bluet and New England Bluet (State Special Concern)—inhabit Owl Pond. These species are highly sensitive to water quality as aquatic nymphs. The Pygmy Snaketail dragonfly (State Special Concern) along the Crooked River requires clean water and intact uplands. **Enhanced riparian buffers benefit all these species.**



Above: Casco's woodlands provide habitat for many mammal, amphibians, and bird species.

Five **rare plant species** occur in Casco. Four species – Dry Land Sedge, Summer Grape (State Threatened), Purple Clematis, and Fern-leaved False Foxglove – grow on Rattlesnake Mountain's dry, rocky slopes. This uncommon habitat also supports two rare **natural communities**: Enriched Northern Hardwoods Forest and Oak-Pine Woodland. Hollow Joe-pye Weed (State Special Concern) occurs along Mayberry Hill Road. A White Oak-Red Oak Forest exemplary natural community is also documented. Two types of Significant Wildlife Habitat (SWH) regulated under Maine's Natural Resources Protection Act occur in Casco: Inland Waterfowl and Wading Bird Habitat (IWWH) and Significant Vernal Pools (SVP). Eight IWWHs provide essential wetland habitat for waterfowl, wading birds, and other wildlife. Activities within 250 feet of IWWHs are regulated to protect water quality.

Vernal pools are temporary water bodies supporting specially adapted species including Wood Frogs, Spotted Salamanders, Blue-spotted Salamanders, and Fairy Shrimp. Seven Significant Vernal Pools are documented in Casco. Starting in 2026, SVPs will include a 100-foot no-build buffer in addition to already regulated activities within 250 feet.

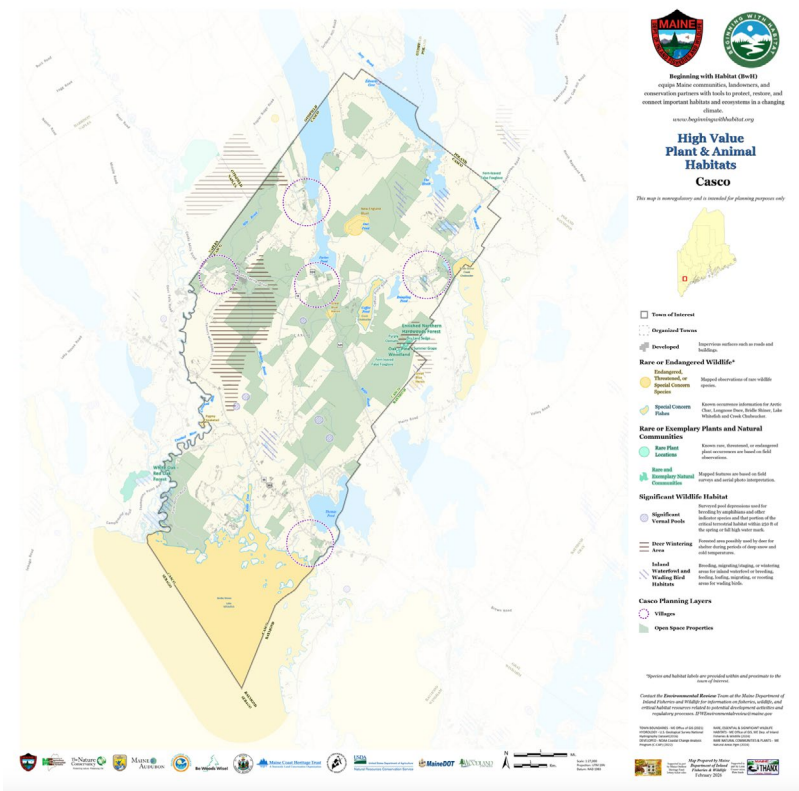
Four Deer Wintering Areas (DWAs) provide critical winter habitat where coniferous forests (especially cedar and hemlock) offer forage, reduced snow depth, and thermal shelter. Protecting these areas from development and intensive winter forestry helps maintain deer populations.

The [High Value Plant and Animals Map](#), produced by the BwH program, shows other areas of rare or endangered wildlife habitats, natural communities, and significant wildlife habitats.

Connectivity

The concept of habitat connectivity – the ability of wildlife to move between different patches of suitable habitat – is critical to long-term population viability and ecosystem resilience. Casco’s landscape-scale forest blocks, particularly those extending across town boundaries into Raymond, Naples, Otisfield, and Poland, create corridors that allow wildlife movement for foraging, breeding, dispersal of young animals, and seasonal migration. Maintaining these connections becomes increasingly important as development fragments the landscape and climate change shifts the geographic ranges of many species.

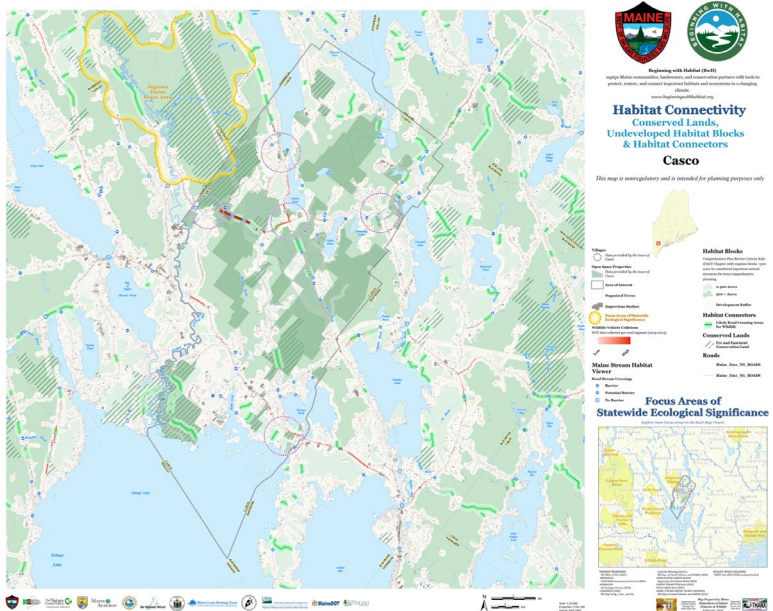
Roadways represent one of the most significant disruptors of habitat connectivity in Casco, creating mortality zones where wildlife attempting to move between habitat patches are killed or deterred from



Above: A small image of the High Value Plant and Animals Map, created by the BwH program. The link in the left-hand column brings you to a full size image of the map.

crossing. Since 2003, Casco has recorded 363 wildlife-vehicle collisions (WVCs) resulting in insurance claims—a figure that substantially underestimates actual wildlife mortality since it excludes species too small to cause vehicle damage, such as reptiles, amphibians, birds, invertebrates, and small mammals that can be struck at rates high enough to cause local population declines. Analysis of Maine DOT collision data from 2014-2024 reveals that the most significant collision concentration occurs along Route 11 west of its intersection with Route 121, with other high-incident stretches including Route 121 north of the Route 11 intersection, Leach Hill Road, Route 302 near Tenney Hill Road, Poland Spring Road, Meadow Road, and Roosevelt Trail.

Community outreach for the COSP identified additional wildlife crossing locations where roads create both ecological and safety concerns. Residents documented frequent wildlife crossing activity at *Mayberry Hill Road and Heath Road* between the Mayberry Hill Preserve and adjacent protected parcels, *Leach Hill Road and Route 11* linking Jugtown Forest with surrounding lands, Route 121 at Parker Pond (particularly important for turtle nesting and movement), and *Mayberry Hill Road near Pleasant Lake* where crossing activity is especially concentrated. The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife’s Beginning with Habitat program corroborates these observations, identifying likely road crossing areas for wildlife that include sections of Routes 11 and 121 as well as other road stretches throughout town.



The [Habitat Connectivity map](#), produced by the BwH program, shows the likely road crossing areas for wildlife and areas of high wildlife-vehicle collisions.

Above: A small image of the Habitat Connectivity Map, created by the BwH program. The link to the right brings you to a full size image of the map.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND NATURAL HAZARD MITIGATION

Casco’s natural resources also provide essential services that buffer the community against flooding, erosion, extreme weather, and other climate-related hazards. As climate change intensifies precipitation events, increases seasonal variability, and elevates temperatures, the protective functions of forests, wetlands, and stream corridors become even more critical.

Forested uplands absorb and gradually release stormwater, reducing the volume and velocity of runoff that would otherwise overwhelm drainage systems, erode stream banks, and cause localized flooding. Wetlands act as natural retention basins, temporarily storing floodwaters during storm events and releasing them slowly over subsequent days and weeks. Vegetated stream buffers stabilize banks, trap sediments, and dissipate the erosive energy of high flows, preventing the gullyng and washouts that degrade water quality and damage infrastructure.

Casco’s conservation efforts are aligned with broader regional strategies for climate adaptation. The Town lies within the study area of a collaborative climate resilience assessment conducted by five land trusts (Loon Echo Land Trust, Mahoosuc Land Trust, Upper Saco Valley Land Trust, Greater Lovell Land Trust, and Western Foothills Land Trust) titled “Climate Resilience Mapper: Landscape Prioritization & Strategic Planning Tool” that identified priority conservation areas based on climate science and landscape connectivity. This regional analysis emphasizes five key components for climate-resilient landscapes:

- Habitat Block Cohesion: Large, unfragmented forest blocks provide climate refugia and allow species to move across the landscape as conditions change
- Terrestrial Climate Resilience: Areas near wetlands and featuring diverse topography offer the greatest capacity for species to persist through changing conditions
- Aquatic Connectivity: Riparian corridors, intact watersheds, and areas with aquifers provide essential



-
- pathways for aquatic species migration and maintain cold-water refugia
- Migration Corridors: Upslope areas and elevation gradients allow plant and animal species to shift their ranges northward and to higher elevations as temperatures increase
 - Existing Conservation Value: Lands already identified by state agencies for biodiversity protection provide foundational conservation assets

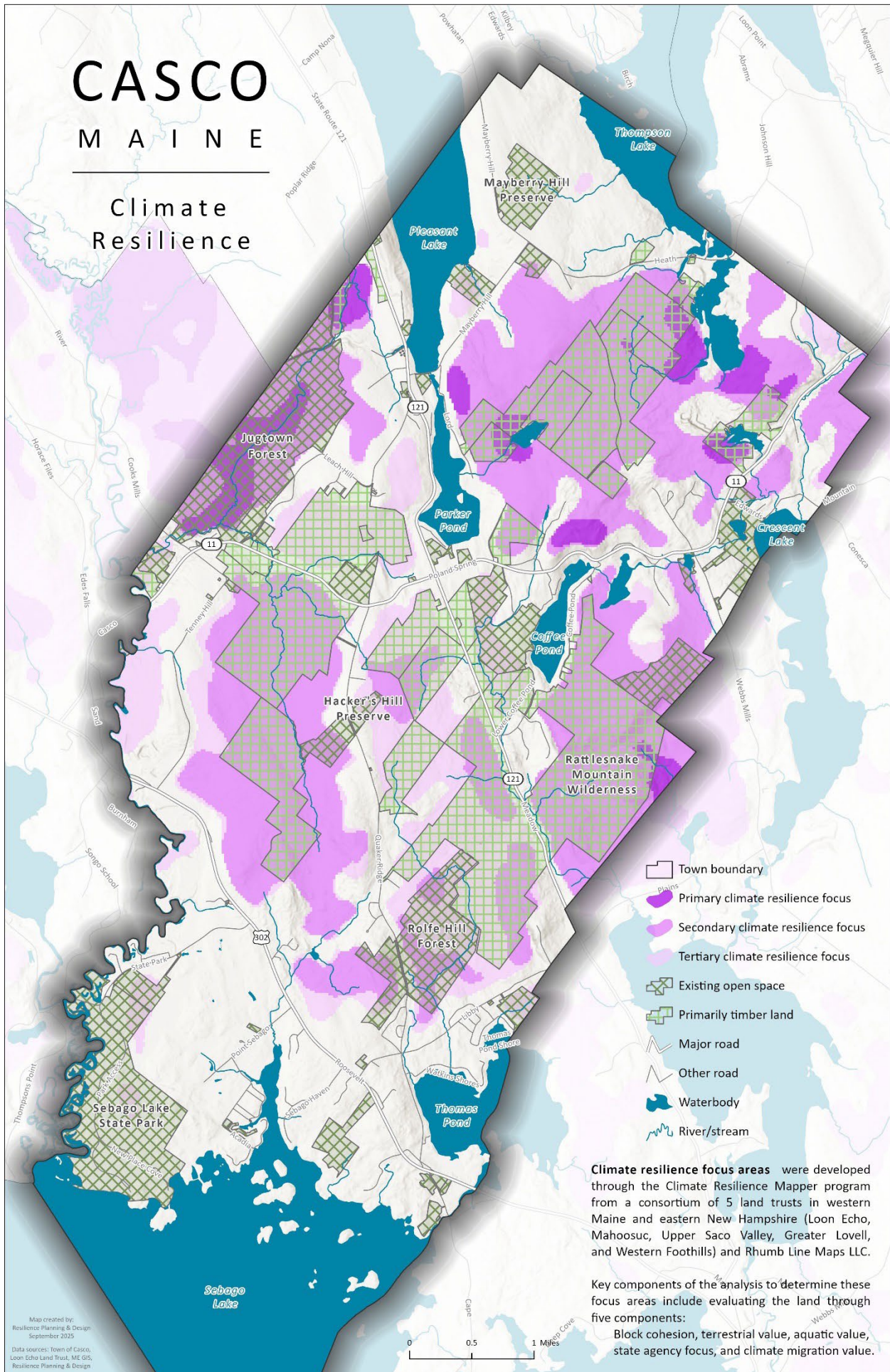
The Climate Resilience map on the following page shows primary, secondary, and tertiary climate resilience focus areas in Casco based on these five components:

Community members participating in the climate resilience mapping activity as part of the Open Space planning process identified numerous locations experiencing recurring flooding, erosion, or storm-related impacts. Areas marked included portions of *Rolfe Hill Forest* where slopes and runoff patterns create erosion concerns, *Quaker Ridge Road* near the Hancock Family Farm experiencing hill-slope runoff, *Meadow Road (Route 121)* near Parker Pond suffering roadway washouts and drainage challenges, the *intersection of Webbs Mills Road (Route 85) and Route 11* subject to frequent flooding, and *Upper Shore Drive* near Thompson Pond facing shoreline flooding and stormwater issues.

The Little Crooked River watershed, which covers much of western Casco, emerged as a particular climate vulnerability due to its history of flood events, multiple road crossings (especially along Route 11), erosion from stormwater runoff, and proximity to development including Crooked River Elementary School. Residents identified the need for improved riparian buffers, bank stabilization, stormwater controls, and floodplain management to reduce risks to property and infrastructure.

CASCO MAINE

Climate Resilience



EFFECTS OF DEVELOPMENT AND LAND USE PATTERNS ON NATURAL RESOURCES

The pattern and intensity of land development will fundamentally shape the health and resilience of Casco's natural resources. While development is necessary to accommodate population growth and economic vitality, the form that development takes determines whether natural systems can continue providing essential services – clean water, wildlife habitat, flood mitigation, and climate resilience – or whether these functions gradually degrade over time. In Casco, three development patterns of concern have emerged over recent decades, each with distinct implications for natural resources:

- low-density suburban sprawl scattered across the town's rural landscape,
- commercial strip development along the Route 302 corridor, and
- shoreland development around the town's signature lakes.

SUBURBAN SPRAWL

The Comprehensive Plan identifies that “much of the residential development in Casco from the 1960s to today follows a suburban pattern.” These suburban neighborhood developments are found throughout town, characterized by single-family homes set back significantly from streets on wide, disconnected lots that frequently exceed one acre in size. Streets often dead-end and lack sidewalks, necessitating that drivers and pedestrians share the roadway. Most critically, these developments lack walkable neighborhood centers that residents can easily reach from their homes, reinforcing automobile dependency and isolation.

This development pattern maximizes land consumption per household while fragmenting habitat and extending the infrastructure – roads, utilities, and services – that the town must maintain. The scattered nature of this growth makes it increasingly difficult to preserve the large, contiguous forest blocks essential for wildlife movement and watershed protection. Each new subdivision chips away at the continuous forest fabric, creating isolated patches that diminish in ecological value as they shrink and become disconnected from one another.

ROUTE 302 CORRIDOR DEVELOPMENT

The Route 302 corridor presents particular challenges that highlight the negative impacts of commercial growth. The Comprehensive Plan describes the corridor as having “no regulations to control the scale of buildings and design,” which has led to “a disconnected hodge-podge of places and aesthetics, from quaint historic buildings to massive commercial structures”. The corridor hosts a significant concentration of light industrial businesses, commercial and storage facilities, and medium-sized industrial repair and auto-oriented commercial establishments. Buildings typically sit far back from the road with expansive parking lots along the street frontage.

This pattern creates large amounts of impervious surface through parking lots, driveways, and building footprints, dramatically increasing stormwater runoff that carries pollutants into nearby waterways. The wide access lanes and individual driveways multiply the number of curb cuts along the corridor and maximize the land disturbed for each business operation. Without meaningful design standards to guide development, businesses have sprawled along the entire length of the corridor rather than concentrating in coherent, walkable nodes where infrastructure could be shared and land consumption minimized.

SHORELAND DEVELOPMENT

Water-dependent resort recreational properties and camps along Sebago Lake – including Point Sebago, Camp Sunshine, and Migis Lodge – function as self-contained campus-like developments with their own internal circulation systems and amenities. While these facilities operate under environmental regulations including shoreland zoning and wetlands protection districts, any new development in these environmentally sensitive areas requires exceptionally careful design to avoid impacts on water quality, aquatic habitat, and the scenic values that draw visitors to the region.

The cumulative impact of nearly 1,000 lots situated within 200 feet of Casco’s major lakes represents significant and ongoing pressure on water resources, as each lot contributes incrementally to stormwater runoff, potential septic impacts, and shoreline modifications that collectively threaten the lake’s exceptional water quality. Furthermore, of the 961 properties that are within 200’ of major lakes, nearly 70% (665) appear to be single-family residential; another 3% (29 properties) are multi-family residential with an additional 4% (41 properties) having commercial uses. In total, more than three-quarters (76%) of the properties within 200’ feet of major lakes in Casco have either residential or commercial uses on them.

These development patterns significantly impact Casco’s natural resources. Stormwater runoff from developed areas represents the primary threat to water quality. As rain or snow melts, runoff picks up petroleum products from driveways and parking lots, soil from eroding landscapes, and fertilizers and pesticides from lawns. While individually small, these pollutant sources collectively represent the



Above: Pleasant Lake Beach

largest source of pollution to Maine's waters, with each new impervious surface channeling contaminated runoff directly into streams, wetlands, and lakes rather than allowing natural soil filtration. Scattered development also fragments wildlife habitat by breaking large forest blocks into smaller, disconnected patches. This fragmentation ultimately reduces habitat for interior forest species that require large, unbroken forest blocks to thrive. Development disrupts wildlife movement corridors, blocking traditional routes animals use to access food, water, and breeding populations. For amphibians dependent on vernal pools, residential development and roads create barriers or mortality zones that sever connections between pools and upland habitat. Similarly, deer wintering areas require specific forest characteristics and connectivity to function effectively, and development pressure in or near these areas degrades their capacity to support populations through harsh winters.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Casco's natural resources – its extensive forests, abundant waterbodies, productive wetlands, and the ecological connections between them – form the foundation of the community's ecological function, economic vitality, and quality of life.

The 7,246 documented acres of conserved and open space lands and 50 miles of recreational trails represent a tremendous platform encouraging forward momentum. Combined with the town's water resources and growing recreational network, the open space lands provide essential ecosystem services including water filtration for regional drinking water supplies, flood mitigation and climate resilience, wildlife habitat and biodiversity support, outdoor recreation opportunities that drive tourism, and the scenic beauty and rural character that define Casco's identity.

Protecting these resources requires recognizing that forestland conservation is not an amenity but essential green infrastructure for watershed protection and water quality and quantity.

The natural filtration provided by Casco's forested watersheds economically benefit both Casco and the greater Portland area by ensuring high water quality. This economic value – combined with the climate, habitat, and recreational benefits intact forests provide – makes land conservation one of the highest-return investments a community can make.

As development pressures increase and climate change intensifies existing environmental stresses, strategic and sustained conservation action becomes increasingly urgent. With strategic conservation efforts, investments in trail connectivity, formalized access agreements, improved signage and parking, and continued partnership with regional conservation organizations, Casco can strengthen its position as a premier destination for outdoor recreation while protecting the natural resources that define the town's character. By protecting priority forest blocks, expanding riparian buffers, maintaining wildlife corridors, and ensuring that land use decisions account for watershed impacts, Casco can preserve the natural resources that sustain both the community and the broader region while positioning itself as a leader in rural conservation and watershed stewardship.



PUBLIC OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

Community input has been central to shaping the COSP.

Between August and December 2025, the Casco Open Space Commission conducted **a comprehensive public engagement process** designed to understand how residents, landowners, teens, and local businesses experience and value the town's open spaces today – and where they believe future investments should be focused. This section summarizes what we learned through these conversations and activities. This feedback along with the data and analysis presented in this Plan provide the foundation for the implementation strategies that follow.

THE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The engagement process was designed with a core principle: *meet people where they are and offer multiple ways to participate*. This approach ensured that a broad range of voices and perspectives were reflected in the planning process. Engagement methods included:

>>> COMMUNITY TABLING EVENTS

Throughout the summer and fall, Casco Open Space Commission members conducted outreach at local events including the Casco Trunk or Treat at Casco Community Park and the Jugtown Community Forest Walk. Commissioners engaged attendees in informal conversations about Casco's natural areas and distributed information about the planning process and advertised the Community Workshop. Project fliers were also posted at high-traffic community locations including the local gas station, Kindred Farms Bakery, the Casco Community Center, and the Casco Public Library. In total, the engagement process reached well over 100 community members through multiple touchpoints, generating rich qualitative and quantitative data about community priorities, concerns, and aspirations for Casco's open spaces.



>>> COMMUNITY WORKSHOP (NOVEMBER 6, 2025)

Approximately 55 participants gathered in the Crooked River Elementary School Gym for an interactive evening workshop. Participants engaged with large-format maps and posters while exploring the existing open space network in Casco. Using dot stickers, participants marked open spaces they love, visit occasionally, or believe need improvement; identified desired new trails, sidewalks, and wildlife corridors; noted gaps and barriers in the road network; highlighted locations where wildlife crossings are needed; and pinpointed areas where recreation infrastructure should be improved. A climate resilience activity invited participants to identify locations regularly impacted by flooding or other natural hazards that are influenced by a changing climate. Handouts with open-ended questions supplemented the mapping stations to collect additional feedback.



Above: November, 2025 Community Workshop

>>> ONLINE SURVEY (NOVEMBER 6 – DECEMBER 6, 2025)

To reach community members who could not attend the workshop, the same materials and questions were made available through an online survey. Approximately 70 responses were collected, providing important input from those either unable to participate in person or those that wanted more time to respond.

>>> YOUTH FOCUS GROUP

To assist with these outreach efforts, Loon Echo Land Trust (LELT) engaged the Cumberland County Government and its Healthy Eating Active Living Promotion Team Lead. Together they hosted a focus group with five teens from Lakes Region High School. The session explored how Casco's youth experience and value open space, where they spend time, how they access recreation areas, and what improvements or new opportunities they would like to see.

>>> LOCAL BUSINESS INTERVIEWS

One-on-one interviews were conducted with local business owners and land managers, including Migis Lodge, Casco Timber, and Hancock Lumber. These conversations provided insight into how outdoor recreation currently supports local operations, where stronger connections could be built, and what opportunities and concerns business owners see as Casco plans for its future.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Across all outreach methods, several themes emerged consistently. These themes paint a community-wide picture of what residents value, what concerns them, and what future they envision for Casco's natural landscapes.

Values and Priorities

Open Space Defines Casco's Identity

Respondents repeatedly described open space as what makes Casco feel like Casco. The town's lakes, rivers, forests, and rural landscapes support recreation, scenic beauty, clean water, wildlife habitat, and quality of life. Survey responses emphasized that open space is central to Casco's small-town feel, heritage, and sense of place. Participants made clear that protecting these natural areas is not about amenities – it is about preserving the fundamental character of the community.

Water Quality is Non-Negotiable

From workshop mapping to online feedback, water quality and shoreline protection emerged as the highest priority across all outreach methods. People identified Pleasant Lake, Thompson Lake, Parker Pond, Thomas Pond, Crescent Lake, and the Crooked River watershed as areas needing strong stewardship to address erosion, runoff, lake-level impacts, invasive species, and long-term climate risks. Respondents emphasized that protecting lakes and wetlands is essential to safeguarding the town's long-term ecological health and recreational appeal.

Wildlife Habitat and Biodiversity Matter

Wildlife habitat protection received strong support, with 58% of survey respondents identifying it as a priority need. Participants emphasized the importance of large, unfragmented forest blocks including Jugtown Forest, Hacker's Hill Preserve, Rattlesnake Mountain, Pine Hill Wilderness, and Hancock Lumber lands. Respondents noted that these areas are essential for wildlife passage and ecological health and expressed concern about habitat fragmentation and the loss of wildlife corridors.

Trails are the Top Recreation Priority

Trail development emerged as the single highest priority, with 78% of survey respondents selecting the need for additional hiking, walking, biking, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and ADA-accessible trail options. Participants consistently expressed interest in better-connected trail networks linking Casco Village, Webbs Mills, Pike's Corner, Rattlesnake Mountain, Rolfe Hill Forest, Pine Hill Wilderness, and nearby towns. One point worth highlighting is the need to balance needed trail maintenance with new trail development.

Access for Everyone

Feedback highlighted that open space provides outdoor access regardless of property ownership or income, offering places everyone can enjoy. Residents, teens, and business owners all noted that many recreational assets are currently hard to find. Clear trailheads, parking areas, online maps, and interpretive information were seen as essential to improving access, wayfinding, and responsible use – without compromising sensitive areas.

Youth Need Safe, Accessible Outdoor Spaces

Teens prioritized accessible lakefronts, parks, and trails near schools and villages; safer walking and biking routes; and outdoor spaces where they feel welcome. They expressed interest in more youth-focused recreation amenities, better connections between destinations, and opportunities to help steward the town's natural spaces. Most teens rely on rides from family or friends to reach outdoor areas, as limited sidewalks and bike-friendly routes make many areas difficult to reach without a car.

Economic Connection to Natural Assets

Local business owners noted that Casco's natural assets support tourism and quality of life. Migis Lodge specifically emphasized that Casco's open spaces and natural setting strongly reinforce the quality-of-life experience that attracts guests. Business owners expressed interest in clearer regional branding, better online information about recreation opportunities, and trails that align with visitor activity, while emphasizing the need to respect private property and ensure any new recreation investment benefits the broader community.

Concerns and Challenges

Balancing Access with Conservation

While many respondents supported expanding outdoor recreation, others raised concerns that overuse could strain natural resources or attract more visitors than the town can support. Some responses expressed concern about over-connecting or overusing open spaces, stressing that wildlife needs uninterrupted habitat and that certain areas function as "hidden jewels." Residents emphasized the need to balance access with conservation and respect Casco's rural setting and ecological integrity.

Infrastructure Gaps and Maintenance Needs

Feedback consistently highlighted concerns related to erosion on steep trails, poor conditions on several ATV/snowmobile routes, and the need to repair or modernize existing recreational infrastructure. Locations identified as needing improvement included Owl Pond, the Casco Village Complex, Pleasant Lake Boat Launch, Lilly Brook Property, 70-Acre Wood, Thompson Lake Boat Launch, Helen Allen Farm, and the Berry Property. Participants stressed that trail expansion must be paired with sustainable maintenance and adequate funding. The highest concentrations of improvement needs appeared around Casco Village near the Town Offices, the Berry Property, and at both Pleasant Lake and Parker Pond boat launches. The Casco Open Space Commission has also identified other town-owned properties to assess in greater detail to help meet community needs.

Connectivity Barriers for People and Wildlife

High-speed roads and state highways create barriers for both people and wildlife. Respondents identified multiple locations where travel by walking, biking, or other non-vehicular modes is difficult, unsafe, or disconnected. Specific concerns were raised about Routes 11 and 302, where teens noted spots feel unsafe due to traffic, lack of lighting, or poor visibility. Participants identified specific wildlife crossing locations needing attention: Mayberry Hill Road and Heath Road (between Mayberry Hill Preserve and protected parcels), Leach Hill Road and Route 11 (linking Jugtown Forest with Hancock Lumber parcels), Route 121 at Parker Pond (particularly for turtle nesting), and Mayberry Hill Road near Pleasant Lake.

Missing Information and Wayfinding

A major challenge identified across all outreach methods was the lack of clear, accessible information about where trails and open spaces are located and how to access them. Respondents described needs for better parking at access points, clearer trailhead markings, additional trail maps and signage, and more accessible information – both online and in print – about land ownership, permitted uses, and wildlife habitat. Participants specifically suggested that Casco could benefit from a centralized, easy-to-share source of information about local recreation and open space options.



Climate Vulnerability

Participants identified specific areas already experiencing climate-related impacts. The Crooked River watershed in western Casco was highlighted as highly vulnerable due to erosion, past flood events, nearby development, and multiple road crossings. Map activity participants also marked locations experiencing recurring flooding and erosion including: Rolfe Hill Forest (southeast and northwest portions), Quaker Ridge Road near Hancock Family Farm, Meadow Road (Route 121) near Parker Pond, the intersection of Webbs Mills Road (Route 85) and Route 11, and Upper Shore Drive near Thompson Pond. Areas experiencing washouts or runoff – such as Mayberry Hill Road, Leach Hill Road, Quaker Ridge, and roadside slopes near Pine Hill – were identified as needing stabilization and vegetation to reduce erosion.

Land Conservation Vulnerability

Participants noted concerns about the long-term protection of key areas. Comments called for expanded permanent protection of areas such as Owl Pond, Rattlesnake Mountain, Pine Hill, and lands between major routes, as well as collaboration with private landowners and land trusts to link already conserved properties and protect lakefront corridors. There was particular interest in ensuring the 70-Acre Wood property is formally conserved in perpetuity, which Loon Echo Land Trust noted they were unaware was town-owned conserved land. The Casco Open Space Commission has also classified a list of town-owned holdings as “Conserve and Enhance” properties to ensure they stay owned by the town and dedicated for conservation and/or recreational purposes.

WHAT THIS MEANS

The 2025 engagement process revealed a community deeply connected to its natural landscapes and committed to thoughtful stewardship of these resources for future generations.

Residents value Casco’s rural character, pristine water quality, and access to outdoor recreation. They recognize the challenges of balancing growth with conservation, maintaining infrastructure, and preparing for climate change. And they envision a future where connected trail networks, protected wildlife corridors, accessible recreation opportunities, and collaborative partnerships create a resilient, vibrant community.

The priorities, concerns, and aspirations documented in this section provide the foundation for the conservation strategies, connectivity plans, and implementation actions detailed in the sections that follow. As evidenced by this overview of the open space outreach process, the COSP is shaped by the community, reflecting the values and vision of the people who call Casco home.

Photo Credit: Eric Dibner



WHERE WE ARE GOING

CRITICAL ASPECTS OF CASCO'S OPEN SPACE NETWORK

Casco's open space network is not merely a collection of protected parcels and recreational trails — it is the physical and ecological foundation upon which residents and visitors depend. The 2024 Comprehensive Plan and community feedback collected during this planning process makes it clear that residents see open space conservation as inseparable from the town's long-term quality of life, economic vitality, and sense of place. This section examines how open space conservation and recreation investment supports and reinforces the key community goals and vision articulated through Casco's planning processes.



Water Quality and Watershed Protection



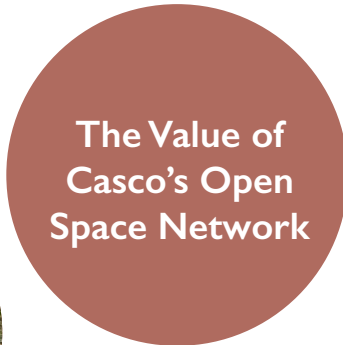
Rural Character and Community Identity



Recreation, Public Health, and Quality of Life



Climate Resilience and Environmental Sustainability



The Value of Casco's Open Space Network



Regional Partnerships and Statewide Alignment



Economic Vitality and Tourism

THE VALUE OF CASCO'S OPEN SPACE NETWORK

Water Quality and Watershed Protection

Casco's forests, wetlands, shorelands, and headwater areas function as natural infrastructure that protects the Sebago Lake watershed—the drinking water source for roughly 200,000 people. Conserved uplands and riparian corridors filter pollutants, regulate runoff, and sustain the exceptional water quality that underpins both ecological health and the town's tourism economy. The Comprehensive Plan recognizes permanent forestland protection as essential to long-term watershed stability.

Rural Character and Community Identity

Lakes, forests, and open landscapes define Casco's rural character and sense of place. Community input emphasizes preserving these resources and reducing reliance on informal access across private lands by securing permanent conservation and trail connections. Protecting countryside landscapes is also essential to the Comprehensive Plan's growth model of compact villages surrounded by conserved rural land.

Recreation, Public Health, and Quality of Life

Casco's roughly 50-mile trail network and valued water access sites provide significant recreation and health benefits but face gaps in connectivity, accessibility, signage, and maintenance. Residents identified expanding non-motorized, universally accessible trails and improving village-to-land connections and public water access as priorities. Strengthening this network supports active living, equitable access, and community well-being.

Economic Vitality and Tourism

Casco's lakes, forests, and trails are core economic assets that attract tens of thousands of visitors annually and support camps, lodging, recreation services, and local businesses. Clean water and accessible natural landscapes sustain this recreation-based economy and reinforce property values and tax base stability. Residents and the Comprehensive Plan identify expanded, better-connected, and well-promoted trails and recreation facilities as opportunities to strengthen year-round tourism and align with Maine's outdoor recreation initiatives.



Above: Parker Pond

Regional Partnerships and Statewide Alignment

Casco's conservation efforts are strengthened through partnerships with Loon Echo Land Trust, Sebago Lake State Park, Portland Water District, neighboring communities, and regional conservation organizations. The town's goals align with Maine's outdoor recreation and watershed initiatives and contribute to larger regional landscapes such as the Jugtown Plains focus area. Coordinated regional conservation and recreation planning will be key to long-term success.

Climate Resilience and Environmental Sustainability

Conserved forests, wetlands, and riparian systems provide climate resilience by moderating flooding, protecting coldwater fisheries, storing carbon, and maintaining habitat connectivity. As climate pressures increase, protecting intact natural systems becomes an essential adaptation strategy. The COSP uses climate-informed data to guide conservation priorities that address current and future risks.

Overall, protecting, connecting, and promoting Casco's open space network is essential to sustaining the town's environment, economy, and community character over the long term.



Above: Mayberry Hill Preserve, a Loon Echo Land Trust property



Above: Jugtown Forest

A PATH FORWARD

OUR VISION

Casco's lakes, forests, fields, and scenic landscapes define the town's identity and shape daily life for residents and visitors alike. These lands and waters provide far more than beautiful views—they protect drinking water and air quality, support wildlife habitat, reduce flood and heat risks, offer recreation and wellness opportunities, reinforce community connections, and sustain the rural character that residents value. Community outreach consistently affirmed that conserving open space and protecting water quality are among Casco's highest priorities. This was further emphasized as maintaining access to trails and shorelines while ensuring that growth does not erode the natural systems that make the town thrive.

The COSP builds directly on the vision and goals of the Casco Comprehensive Plan by prioritizing the protection of woods, waters, and open space as a foundation for long-term resilience and quality of life. By coordinating conservation, recreation, and stewardship efforts, Casco can guide growth strategically, strengthen connections between villages and natural areas, and formalize land protection and public access in ways that balance community use with habitat and watershed protection. The following vision statement provides a clear and lasting framework to further guide these efforts.

A Vision for Casco's Woods, Waters, and Open Space

Casco will conserve and steward its woods, waters, and open spaces as the foundation of the region's identity, health, and long-term resilience. Forests, lakes, ponds, wetlands, and working lands will be protected to safeguard water quality, sustain wildlife habitat, and maintain the scenic beauty and rural character that residents value. An interconnected network of conserved lands, trails, and water access points will provide safe, welcoming opportunities for recreation, exploration, and year-round enjoyment for people of all ages and abilities, while supporting habitat corridors for wildlife.

Through thoughtful planning, strategic partnerships, and active stewardship, Casco will guide growth away from sensitive resources, formalize land protection and public access agreements, and invest in infrastructure that strengthens climate resilience and watershed health. By educating residents, collaborating with landowners and regional partners, and celebrating the town's natural assets, Casco will foster a shared culture of conservation that enhances community well-being, supports local vitality, and preserves access to these landscapes for future generations.

GOALS

The COSP is guided by **four overarching goals** that reflect the community's vision for conserving natural resources, enhancing connectivity, building implementation capacity, and strengthening the town's identity and economy. These goals provide a framework for the actions detailed later in this plan, ensuring that open space efforts are purposeful, coordinated, and responsive to community priorities. The goals address both immediate needs – such as protecting water quality and expanding trail access – and long-term desires for Casco's resilience, rural character, and quality of life. Developed through a collaborative planning process and informed by the town's history and vision, these goals represent a shared commitment to stewarding Casco's unique landscapes for current and future generations.

THE FOUR OPEN SPACE PLANNING GOALS ARE:

Goal 1: Conserve & Protect Casco's Unique Landscapes and Water Resources

- Prioritize land conservation efforts to safeguard historical, wild, working, and water-rich landscapes, with a strong emphasis on protecting water quality in lakes, ponds, rivers, and wetlands.
- Prevent development sprawl by coordinating an interconnected open space network that radiates from our villages and expands access to trails and waterbodies.

Goal 2: Enhance Connectivity and Expand Access for People and Wildlife

- Develop a refined trail network with safe on- and off-road connections linking villages, waterways, conserved lands, and other destinations.
- Expand open space infrastructure – including parking, wayfinding, trails, and both trail and water access points – to support recreation and improved access.

Goal 3: Lead as a Resilient, Strategic, and Well-Resourced Community

- Create an engaging, action-oriented open space plan with clear steps for conservation, water quality protection, infrastructure investment, and fundraising.
- Strengthen our implementation capacity by partnering with regional organizations, major landowners, and the community to advance land use and open space priorities.

Goal 4: Strengthen Community Identity and Economic Vitality Through Education and Stewardship

- Communicate and educate residents and visitors about land use, development, conservation, water quality protection, and recreation initiatives and opportunities.
- Attract families and outdoor enthusiasts by enhancing Casco's reputation as a connected, water-rich, and recreation-oriented community that stands apart from others in the region.

This section of the COSP assesses where the greatest opportunities lie for conservation and recreation enhancement, what constraints and vulnerabilities may limit or complicate progress, and what priority needs have emerged from both technical analysis and public input. The assessment is organized around the four overarching goals that guide this Plan which will also help organize and guide the implementation of this Plan. Throughout this section, the **guiding principle** that has shaped the entire COSP applies: **during all land acquisitions and management decisions, the Town of Casco will work to balance public access and rural character with the protection of wildlife habitat.**



GOAL I: CONSERVE & PROTECT CASCO'S UNIQUE LANDSCAPES AND WATER RESOURCES

Public Feedback

Community input directly reinforces this goal. **Water quality emerged as the top priority across all outreach methods**, with specific emphasis on protecting Pleasant Lake, Thompson Lake, Parker Pond, the Crooked River watershed, and other waterbodies. The strong support for wildlife habitat protection and conservation land demonstrates community commitment to safeguarding Casco's natural landscapes. The desire to prevent development sprawl and maintain an interconnected open space network that radiates from villages directly aligns with this goal's emphasis on coordinating conservation efforts while expanding access to trails and waterbodies.

Opportunities for Conservation and Recreation Enhancement

Casco enters its open space planning process from a position of considerable strength. More than **7,200 acres** across **113 inventoried properties** form the existing conservation and open space network, anchored by Sebago Lake State Park, Jugtown Forest, Rolfe Hill Conservation Area, Mayberry Hill Preserve, and key municipal holdings.

Several significant land conservation opportunities are also within reach.

Permanently protecting the Owl Pond and Pine Hill Wilderness area, advancing conservation of Rattlesnake Mountain where public access currently depends on informal arrangements, and securing lands along Quaker Ridge East and West would close critical gaps in the existing network. Equally important are the wildlife and ecological corridors that link Casco's major conserved blocks – including connections between Rolfe Hill and Rattlesnake Mountain, between Pleasant Lake and Thompson Lake, and between southern Casco and areas further north – which should be a focus of targeted land acquisition and easement work. Other key wetland complexes – including areas near The Heath, across from Webbs Mills, and behind the Hancock Mill on Route 11 – should be considered as priorities for conservation given their value for biodiversity, water filtration, flood storage, and wildlife habitat.



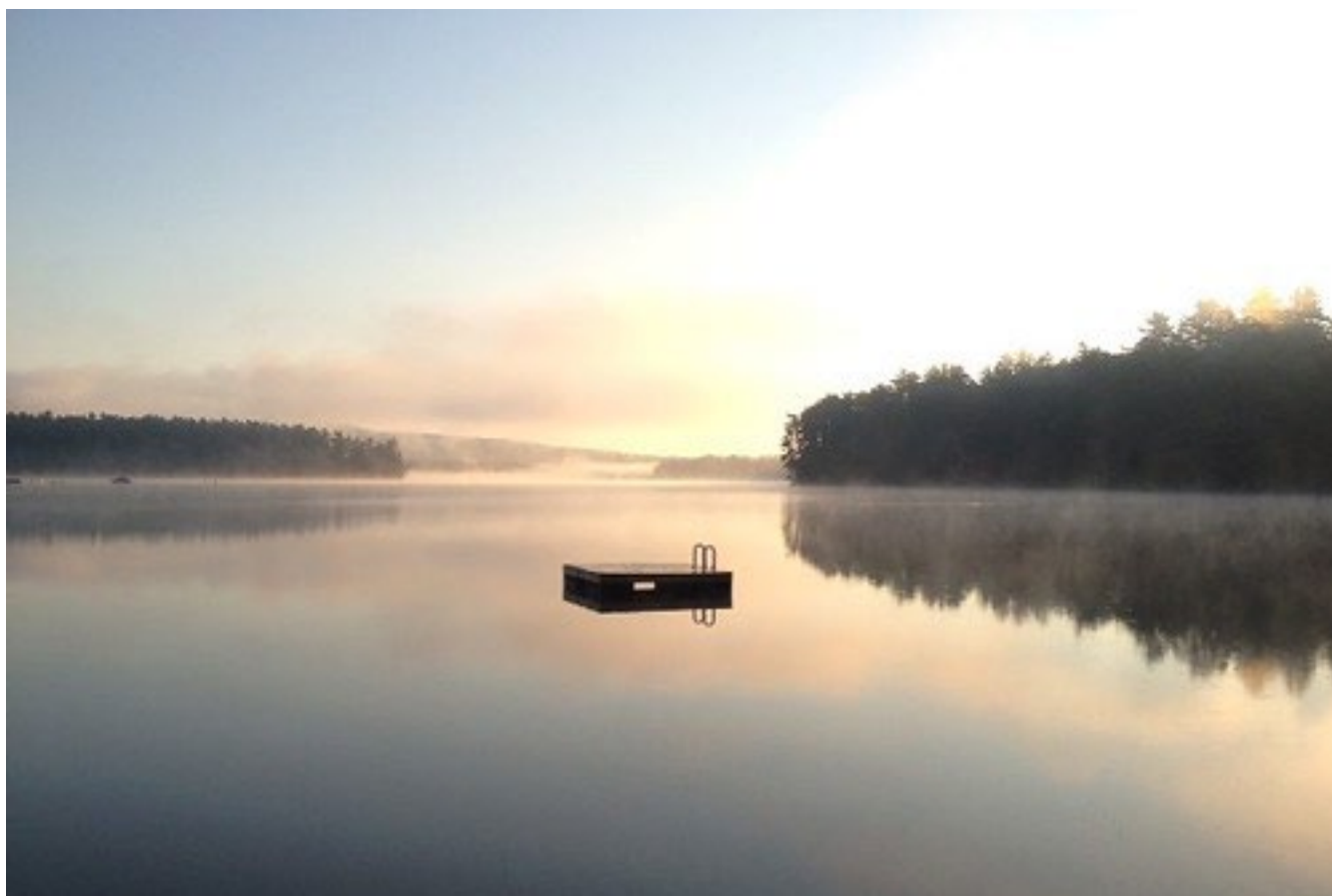
Above: Pleasant Lake

Funding mechanisms including Land for Maine's Future, conservation easement tax benefits, and the Maine Trails Bond could make action on these priorities feasible. Incentivizing landowners to maintain their lands as open space through Tree Growth and Open Space current use tax programs, and inventorying all currently enrolled properties to understand the pattern and vulnerability of working lands, would give the Town a clearer picture of where future conservation action is most urgent.

The Portland Water District's ongoing interest in protecting the Sebago Lake watershed and the demonstrated willingness of Hancock Lumber and Casco Timber to maintain informal public access on their combined 5,000-plus acres of working forestland represent partnership opportunities that, if formalized, would significantly expand Casco's permanently protected landscape. Several summer camps and former camp landowners have also expressed interest in working with the Town to expand the open space and recreation network – relationships worth deepening as part of a proactive conservation strategy.

Several town-owned properties represent meaningful near-term opportunities for conservation and recreation enhancement. The 70-Acre Wood property – Casco’s largest municipally owned natural area – would benefit from formal permanent conservation designation, improved trailhead access, and phased trail development. Several properties identified by the Open Space Commission have been categorized as “Conserve and Enhance” holdings never to be sold, which collectively account for more than 170 acres with strong conservation and recreational potential.

Water quality protection efforts are further strengthened by Casco’s established network of monitoring organizations – including the Thompson Lake Environmental Association, the Pleasant Lake and Parker Pond Association, Thomas Pond Improvement Association, Crescent Lake Watershed Association, and the Oxford and Cumberland County Soil and Water Conservation Districts – whose work provides essential data for guiding conservation priorities. The establishment of a Water Quality Commission, as recommended in Casco’s draft Water Quality Plan, would provide crucial coordination for reviewing shoreland zone permits, managing town budget allocations to these associations, maintaining grant opportunity lists, and working with neighboring towns on shared water resources.



Above: Crescent Lake



Photo Credit: Gordova Symanski

Constraints and Vulnerabilities

The most **significant environmental constraint** facing Casco's conservation efforts is the **vulnerability of privately held lands that have not been permanently protected**. More than 5,000 acres of working forestland – owned by Hancock Lumber and Casco Timber – provide informal public access and critical watershed functions today but carry no permanent conservation protection. A change in ownership or economic circumstances could trigger development of large, forested tracts, fragmenting forest blocks, degrading water quality, and fundamentally altering the town's character and natural resource base. Residents identified this vulnerability explicitly during community engagement, expressing concern that Casco could “lose the one great thing that makes up their identity and way of life.”

Development pressure from the Portland metropolitan area compounds this environmental risk. As housing costs drive migration into outlying communities, demand for rural residential lots in lake-rich landscapes like Casco is likely to intensify. Shoreline development presents particular concern: approximately 1,000 lots lie within 200 feet of Casco's major lakes, and each incremental alteration – expanded lawns, new driveways, aging or improperly maintained septic systems, cleared shoreline vegetation – contributes cumulatively to water quality degradation. Even low-density residential development can generate meaningful water quality impacts when homes are sited on steep slopes, stormwater management is inadequate, or vegetative buffers are removed. The conversion of working forest to residential use may also reduce the economic viability of sustainable forestry, creating pressure for further fragmentation and development.

Funding and maintenance challenges limit Casco's ability to respond to these pressures. The capacity of volunteer-driven lake associations varies, and ensuring consistent water quality monitoring across all of Casco's waterbodies requires ongoing town support and coordinated funding that has not always been reliable or predictable. Invasive species – including aquatic invasives such as variable milfoil and terrestrial invasives including Japanese knotweed, autumn olive, and glossy buckthorn – pose compounding threats that are costly to manage once established and depend on sustained volunteer and financial capacity that could be problematic to sustain.

Taken together, these constraints underscore the importance of acting strategically and collaboratively. Through targeted land conservation, strengthened partnerships with private landowners and watershed organizations, continued investment in water quality monitoring, and careful management of shoreline and forestland development pressures, Casco can maintain the ecological integrity of its lakes, forests, and wetlands while accommodating thoughtful growth.



GOAL 2: ENHANCE CONNECTIVITY AND EXPAND ACCESS FOR PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE

Public Feedback

The community's **overwhelming support for trails** and the extensive input on desired trail connections demonstrate strong alignment with this goal. Participants identified specific trail networks linking villages, waterways, and conserved lands – exactly what this goal envisions through its refined trail network. The identification of wildlife crossing locations (Mayberry Hill Road and Heath Road, Leach Hill Road and Route 11, Route 121 at Parker Pond, Mayberry Hill Road near Pleasant Lake) and emphasis on safe non-motorized routes reflects the dual focus on connectivity for both people and wildlife. The call for improved parking, wayfinding, signage, and access points directly supports the open space infrastructure improvements outlined in this goal.

Opportunities for Conservation and Enhancement

The existing **50-mile trail network** spanning Sebago Lake State Park, Loon Echo Land Trust properties, Jugtown Forest, municipal lands, and a broader informal network of private land provides a strong foundation to build upon. The central location of **Rolfe Hill Conservation Area** – permanently protected in 2024 – makes it a natural anchor for expanded **trail connectivity**, with a desired trail corridor extending from Route 302 through Rolfe Hill toward the Rattlesnake Mountain Wilderness and ultimately to Webbs Mills Village emerging clearly from community input. Emerging **mountain bike trail development** at Rolfe Hill opens new year-round recreational opportunities that could attract visitors and support local businesses across seasons.

Community input through the workshop mapping and outreach process identified a set of specific trail corridors and recreation enhancement opportunities across town – from expanded access at the 70-Acre Wood, Pine Hill Wilderness, and Rattlesnake Mountain, to new trail connections involving the Hancock Lumber properties, improved river access near the Naples town line, and an aspirational town-wide loop trail linking Casco's major waterbodies. The Berry Property, Parker Pond, and formalizing the recreational



Fritillary butterfly
Source: Rebecca Myers

and scenic benefits of the island within Parker Pond represent near-term waterfront opportunities at the heart of town.

For wildlife, significant connectivity enhancement opportunities exist where conserved lands are in close proximity but separated by roads or unprotected parcels. **Culvert replacement and stream passage restoration** represent a particularly compelling dual-benefit opportunity: upgrading the 13 identified barrier culverts to Stream Smart designs would restore aquatic connectivity for brook trout and other species while simultaneously strengthening flood resilience. Expanding **vegetative buffers** along streams, wetlands, and lake shorelines, and applying living shoreline practices to stabilization projects, would further enhance ecological connectivity and resilience across the landscape.

Constraints and Vulnerabilities

High-speed state routes – particularly Routes 11, 121, 302, Poland Spring Road, Meadow Road, and Roosevelt Trail – create significant barriers for both people and wildlife, and addressing them requires coordination with agencies beyond Casco’s direct control. Teens identified specific locations along Routes 11 and 302 where walking or biking feels unsafe due to traffic volumes, lack of lighting, or poor sightlines. Wildlife crossing locations at Mayberry Hill Road and Heath Road (between Mayberry Hill Preserve and adjacent protected parcels), Leach Hill Road and Route 11 (linking Jugtown Forest with surrounding lands), Leach Hill Road and West Fountain Hill Road, Route 121 at Parker Pond (important for turtle nesting), and Mayberry Hill Road near Pleasant Lake all represent points where roads interrupt documented wildlife movement corridors. Statewide, Maine experiences an estimated \$300 million in annual costs related to wildlife-vehicle collisions, underscoring the economic as well as ecological stakes of inaction.

Access and equity considerations represent a meaningful and under-addressed constraint. Much of Casco’s recreational network is effectively inaccessible to residents without personal vehicles – a barrier that falls hardest on teens, older adults, lower-income households, and people with disabilities. Most teens rely on family or friends for rides to outdoor areas because limited sidewalks and the absence of

safe non-motorized routes make independent travel difficult or impossible. Community engagement documented specific sidewalk gaps, dangerous road conditions for cyclists, and desired bike lane and multi-use path connections across several parts of town – all of which are detailed in the “What We Did: Inventory and Analysis section” and should inform future coordination with Casco’s Safe Streets Committee.

Maintenance and funding challenges compound these access constraints. The existing trail network relies heavily on informal landowner agreements that carry no long-term security. Infrastructure gaps are widespread: inadequate parking at trailheads (including Owl Pond), missing signage, limited wayfinding information, and deteriorating trail conditions on ATV and snowmobile routes reflect a maintenance backlog that must be addressed in parallel with any expansion. Community feedback consistently stressed that adding new trails or access points without the capacity to maintain them risks degrading the network overall, and that any expanded trail development must have maintenance plans and responsibilities established before construction begins.

While these constraints present real challenges, they also help clarify where thoughtful coordination and phased investment will be most important. By prioritizing partnerships with state agencies, integrating trail planning with transportation safety initiatives, focusing on strategic wildlife crossing improvements, and pairing new access points with long-term stewardship plans, Casco can expand connectivity in ways that are both sustainable and equitable.





Lily Flower

Source: Michelle Sanborn

GOAL 3: LEAD AS A RESILIENT, STRATEGIC, AND WELL-RESOURCED COMMUNITY

Public Feedback

Community input emphasized the need for **strategic planning, adequate maintenance capacity and funding, and collaborative partnerships**. The desire for a “clear, long-term vision” and “strategic, proactive plan” reflects this goal’s call for an engaging, action-oriented open space plan with clear steps for conservation, water quality protection, infrastructure investment, and funding. The strong support for partnerships with Loon Echo Land Trust, Hancock Lumber, Lakes Region ATV Club, Crooked River Snowmobile Club, lake associations, and other organizations and neighboring communities aligns perfectly with strengthening implementation capacity by partnering with regional organizations, major landowners, and the community to advance land use and open space priorities.

Implicit within this goal is climate resilience, which emerged as a critical theme throughout the community engagement process. Residents identified climate-vulnerable areas, emphasized the importance of protecting wetlands and forested uplands for flood mitigation, and linked land conservation directly to watershed health and climate adaptation.

Opportunities for Conservation and Enhancement

Casco is well-positioned to pursue a diverse portfolio of **state and federal funding for resilience-related open space investment**. Alignment with Maine’s 10-Year Outdoor Recreation Economy Roadmap, the 2025–2035 State Wildlife Action Plan, the 2011 Lake Region Greenprint, the Beginning with Habitat program, and the Portland Water District’s interest in source watershed protection creates a foundation of partnerships and priorities that can support grant applications to Land for Maine’s Future, the Maine Trails Bond, FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, and other programs. The town’s active recreation clubs, lake associations, and volunteer trail maintainers represent **significant untapped implementation capacity** that, if better coordinated perhaps through the Casco Open Space Commission, could accomplish far more than the town could on its own. Creative conservation

finance tools – such as transfer development fees and conservation subdivision design – also represent underutilized mechanisms for simultaneously improving housing options and protecting large areas of open land.

Casco’s open space network functions as natural climate infrastructure, and the town has a significant opportunity to **build long-term resilience through strategic conservation** targeting the landscapes that provide the greatest protective value. Wetlands absorb and slowly release floodwaters; intact forest cover intercepts rainfall and reduces stormwater runoff during intense precipitation events; riparian buffers stabilize stream banks and maintain the cooler water temperatures that coldwater fisheries depend on;



Above: Crooked River during a flood event in 2023

and large, unfragmented forest blocks sequester carbon and allow wildlife to shift ranges as conditions change. **Strategic conservation of flood-prone areas, steep slopes, and headwater zones is a cost-effective climate adaptation strategy** – studies consistently show that investing in forest conservation for flood mitigation generates returns through stormwater retention, erosion prevention, and avoided infrastructure damage that far exceed the cost of conservation. Living shoreline practices offer a nature-based complement to structural stabilization approaches, particularly at lake beaches and streambanks experiencing erosion.

Constraints and Vulnerabilities

Climate change is amplifying existing environmental stresses on Casco’s natural systems in ways that require both immediate and long-term responses. More intense precipitation events increase flooding, erosion, and pollutant loading to streams and lakes, while warmer water temperatures stress coldwater fisheries and favor invasive aquatic plants. Community engagement identified numerous specific locations across town experiencing recurring flooding, erosion, slope instability, and stormwater management problems – all documented in detail in the Outreach Report found in the Appendix - and all are candidates for prioritization in future conservation and infrastructure investment decisions.

Funding and capacity constraints represent a structural and persistent challenge. The Casco Open Space Commission and volunteer-driven lake associations operate with limited staff, time, and financial resources that are consistently outpaced by the scale of maintenance and conservation needs. Funding for land acquisition, trail development, and infrastructure maintenance is often project-specific, making it difficult to execute multi-year work plans, respond quickly to time-sensitive conservation opportunities, or sustain improvements once made. Without a more reliable and diversified funding base – combining municipal appropriations, state and federal grants, private philanthropy, and watershed partner investment – Casco risks losing conservation opportunities to faster-moving buyers or watching existing infrastructure deteriorate faster than it can be repaired.



GOAL 4: STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY IDENTITY AND ECONOMIC VITALITY THROUGH EDUCATION AND STEWARDSHIP

Public Feedback

The widespread call for **better information, signage, mapping tools, and online resources** directly supports the education and communication components of this goal. Business owners' interest in clearer regional branding demonstrates awareness of the economic connection between open space and Casco's appeal. Migis Lodge's feedback that Casco's open spaces and natural setting strongly reinforce the quality-of-life experience that attracts guests and respondents' identification of open space as a driver of the local recreation economy, a draw for visitors, a contributor to property values align with the economic vitality element of this goal. The youth focus group's desire for stewardship opportunities and the recognition that open space defines Casco's identity demonstrate community readiness for enhanced education and engagement programs. The desire to attract families and outdoor enthusiasts through better trail networks and recreation infrastructure directly supports enhancing Casco's reputation as a connected, water-rich, recreation-oriented community that stands apart from others in the region.

Opportunities for Conservation and Enhancement

Casco's open space assets are **significant economic drivers**, attracting an estimated **60,000 visitors annually** and supporting the local tourism economy through Sebago Lake State Park, summer camps, resort properties, and nature-based recreation. The Crooked River – a renowned coldwater fishery, limited to fly fishing only, and the source of approximately 38% of Sebago Lake's water supply – is itself a defining community and regional resource that deserves greater recognition and visibility alongside the lakes and ponds. Business owners expressed strong interest in clearer regional branding and better online information about recreation opportunities. A unified, well-promoted open space network with **consistent signage, an updated online presence, and connections to regional recreation marketing** would directly support local businesses and help Casco compete as a year-round destination.

Alignment with Maine’s 10-Year Outdoor Recreation Economy Roadmap creates additional opportunities to benefit from statewide marketing and to access programs designed to grow the outdoor recreation economy.

Community engagement revealed that residents of all ages – including teens who expressed strong interest in stewardship roles and in being part of caring for the town’s natural spaces – are eager for better information about what open spaces exist, how to reach them, and how to use them responsibly. Structured stewardship programs, volunteer trail days, youth conservation corps opportunities, outdoor learning facilities at year-round playgrounds, lake monitoring partnerships, and educational signage at



Above: Casco Community Center, a beloved public space in town

key natural areas could build long-term and generational capacity while deepening the community’s connection to its open spaces. Strengthening the relationship between Casco’s open space and recreational network and the villages within town is both a quality-of-life goal and an economic one. The Maine “Valuing Lakes” study (2024) found the total economic value of Maine’s lakes exceeds \$14 billion, with a one-foot increase in water clarity correlating with a 1.1% increase in property values – evidence that resonates broadly and strengthens the argument for sustained public investment in open space.

Constraints and Vulnerabilities

A major barrier to realizing Casco’s open space potential is the **lack of clear, accessible information** about where trails and open spaces are located, how to reach them, and what activities are permitted. Respondents across all outreach methods described confusion about land ownership, trail access, and permitted uses. Without a centralized, easy-to-use information source – online, in print, and at trailheads – residents and visitors cannot fully benefit from the network that already exists, and the town cannot build public support for continued investment in expanding it.

Balancing **expanded access and promotion** with **conservation and ecological functionality** is a genuine and ongoing tension that requires deliberate management. Some community members raised concerns that overuse could strain natural resources, attract more visitors than the town can sustainably support, or compromise the quiet rural character that makes Casco distinctive. The **maintenance funding** challenge is equally acute: community members stressed that expanding access without adequate maintenance capacity risks degrading the very resources that make Casco worth visiting. Several town-owned properties currently lack a defined long-term direction, which creates uncertainty about how they should be managed, invested in, or promoted. Resolving this uncertainty is a necessity for strategic municipal investment and stewardship.

New Years Eve Glide
Source: Jules Pieri



HOW WE GET THERE

A BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE

BEST PRACTICES FOR ACTION

Sunrise on Quaker Ridge

Photo Credit: Danielle Bean



Open space planning has matured significantly over the past two decades from reactive land preservation focused on individual parcels to proactive, systems-level conservation that recognizes the interconnections between ecological health, climate resilience, community wellbeing, and economic sustainability.

The COSP reflects this evolution. The findings and trends presented in this section situate Casco's planning work within broader shifts in the field, demonstrating that the priorities identified through community engagement and technical analysis are well-aligned with current best practices in conservation, connectivity, equity, and climate adaptation. Each of the best practices that follow is grounded in Casco's specific conditions and reinforced by data, community input, and the natural resource analysis documented throughout this plan. This information should help inform the implementation efforts outlined in this section of the Plan.

From Reactive to Proactive Conservation

Communities have historically passed conservation motions that are reactive measures to preserve remaining elements of a landscape too far gone, which results in small, disconnected fragments with limited ecological value. Modern planning now emphasizes proactive, comprehensive strategies that identify priority conservation areas before development pressure intensifies by using data and community input to guide decisions about which lands to protect and when.

Casco is at an inflection point where this shift is both timely and urgent. Development pressure, the vulnerability of large privately held forest tracts, and the town's location within a regionally significant watershed all create conditions where waiting to act risks losing the most ecologically valuable lands before conservation and recreation priorities can take hold. Casco has already begun making this shift – the 2024 Comprehensive Plan's proactive spatial framework, the climate resilience mapping completed through the Open Space planning process, the ongoing draft Water Quality Plan, and significant input and interest from Casco's residents all reflect a community that understands the value of getting ahead of development pressure rather than responding to it.

Analysis as the Foundation for Strategic Planning

Effective open space planning begins with understanding what already exists. Analysis of open space, recreational, and natural resource inventories provide the evidence base for identifying priority conservation areas and making defensible decisions about where investment will have the greatest ecological return. This data-driven approach allows communities to move from “we should protect open space” to “here is specifically where, why, and how.”

In addition to the open space and recreation inventory found in the COSP, Casco’s partnership with the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife’s Beginning with Habitat (BwH) program supports this foundation. BwH data underpins the natural resource analysis in the “What We Did: Inventory and Analysis” section, informing the identification of priority forest blocks, significant wildlife habitats, rare species locations, vernal pools, deer wintering areas, and wildlife-vehicle collision hotspots. The climate resilience mapping produced through the five-land-trust collaborative assessment (as discussed on pages 31-33) adds a forward-looking analytical layer that positions Casco to prioritize conservation actions that will remain ecologically valuable as climate conditions change. These inventories are not static documents; the How We Get There section and Implementation Matrix of the COSP calls for ongoing coordination with BwH and other agencies for site visits and field surveys to refine and update the data over time.



Open Space as Climate Infrastructure

Climate adaptation has become a central driver of open space planning rather than an ancillary benefit. Green infrastructure improves community resilience by managing flood risk, reducing drought impacts, protecting water quality, and providing the natural buffers that reduce the cost of extreme weather events. Studies consistently show that building and maintaining natural infrastructure often costs less than repairing damage from natural disasters, with benefits routinely outweighing costs.

For Casco, this trend is not hypothetical. The town's forested watersheds provide natural filtration services that protect the drinking water supply for Greater Portland – services that would otherwise require hundreds of millions of dollars in built treatment infrastructure. Using forward-thinking climate resilience data created by a five-land-trust collaboration including Loon Echo Land Trust, community members participating in the 2025 Open Space planning process identified recurring flooding and erosion at specific locations across town. The climate resilience framing transforms land conservation from a scenic preservation exercise into a forward-looking infrastructure investment – one that supports public safety, protects community assets, and reduces long-term costs for Casco and the broader region.

What is Green Infrastructure?

Green infrastructure is the interconnected network of natural systems – forests, wetlands, stream corridors, parks, and open spaces – that provides ecological services and community benefits. Unlike traditional built infrastructure, it works with natural processes to manage stormwater, filter water, reduce flooding, support wildlife habitat, and build community resilience.



Above: A rain garden at Sagamore Village in Portland.

Equity and Access as Planning Imperatives

Contemporary open space planning explicitly considers the equitable distribution of open space benefits. Existing standards often fail to recognize the full range of potential resources at the neighborhood and community level, and underserved populations – including low-income households, older adults, children, and people with disabilities – frequently have less access to quality open space. Planning that ignores these disparities risks investing in conservation that benefits only those already well-served, while failing the residents who may have the greatest need for accessible green space, clean water, and safe recreational opportunities.

In Casco, equity and access are not theoretical concerns – they surfaced consistently and concretely throughout community engagement methods. Teens reported that most of Casco's open spaces are

effectively unreachable without a car, because limited sidewalks and the absence of safe non-motorized connections between villages make independent travel impossible for most young people. The youth focus group, conducted in partnership with the Cumberland County Government’s Healthy Eating Active Living Promotion Team, documented a generation of Casco residents who value outdoor space but face real structural barriers to accessing it. The trail network also lacks ADA-accessible options at most locations. Addressing these gaps through sidewalks, bike-friendly routes, safe crossings, ADA-accessible trailheads, and recreational amenities near schools and village centers is both an equity imperative and a quality-of-life investment that serves the full Casco community, not just those with cars and physical mobility.

Community Engagement Produces Better Plans

Research and practice consistently confirm that community input is critical to local open space planning. Public workshops, mapping exercises, surveys, and stakeholder interviews help identify conservation priorities and specific parcels most important for local conservation, ensuring that plans reflect actual community values and needs rather than planner assumptions. Meaningful engagement also builds the public support necessary for implementation – communities that have participated in shaping a plan are far more likely to vote for conservation funding, accept new ordinances, and volunteer for stewardship. Casco’s 2025 engagement process exemplifies this best practice.

Between August and December 2025, the Casco Open Space Commission reached well over 100 community members through tabling events, a community workshop attended by approximately 55 participants, an online survey yielding approximately 70 responses, a youth focus group at Lakes Region High School, and interviews with local business owners. The result was not simply a list of public preferences but a thorough, spatially specific dataset: mapped trail desires, identified wildlife crossing locations, documented infrastructure gaps, and a clear community-wide prioritization of water quality protection, trail development, and wildlife habitat conservation. This engagement process directly shaped the priorities of the COSP, and its findings will continue to be the touchstone for implementation decisions in the years ahead.





Sunrise in Casco
Source: Amy Brown

The Economic Case for Open Space is Strong and Growing

Communities increasingly recognize that open space conservation generates demonstrable economic returns. Protected natural areas support property values, drive tourism and recreation spending, reduce infrastructure costs, protect drinking water supplies, and attract the residents and businesses that value quality of life. In addition to the 2024 “Valuing Lakes” study by the Maine Lakes Society and the University of Maine that found a direct correlation between water clarity and increased property values, other research documents that properties near to permanently protected open spaces result in a valuation 8–10% or more over comparable unprotected properties.

For Casco, the economic argument for conservation is inseparable from the ecological one. The town’s 2024 Comprehensive Plan states plainly that “the lakes and ponds in Casco are the economic engines for the town,” and that the stability of the tourist-based economy depends on good water quality. A degraded lake, a fragmented forest, or an overused and undermaintained trail network is not just an ecological loss, but an economic one. Aligning Casco’s open space planning with Maine’s 10-Year Outdoor Recreation Economy Roadmap positions the town to access state-supported funding and partnerships while making the case to residents and elected officials that conservation investment pays returns in economic as well as ecological terms.

Watershed-Scale and Regional Thinking

Open space planning increasingly recognizes that protecting individual resources – a single lake, a single forest block, a single wildlife corridor – requires landscape-level approaches that consider entire watersheds and ecological systems. Cooperative partnerships working at local, regional, and watershed scales are essential because ecological processes do not respect municipal boundaries. A forest parcel conserved in Casco protects the water quality of downstream lakes in Raymond and the drinking water supply in Portland.

Casco’s natural resources make regional thinking not just a best practice but a practical necessity. Four HUC 12 watersheds make up Casco all of which extend into neighboring towns. The Jugtown Plains Focus Area of Statewide Ecological Significance crosses into Harrison, Otisfield, and Naples. The five-land-trust climate resilience assessment was intentionally regional in scope, identifying conservation priorities that cross municipal lines. The Portland Water District’s source water protection work encompasses the entire Sebago Lake watershed across 24 towns. Frameworks including the 2011 Lake Region Greenprint, the 2025–2035 State Wildlife Action Plan, and the work of Sebago Clean Waters all provide technical tools, funding pathways, and science-based strategies that Casco can use to align local conservation decisions with broader watershed and biodiversity outcomes.

Implementation of Capacity and Funding Innovation

Even the most well-crafted open space plan will stall without the organizational capacity and financial resources to implement it. Communities are increasingly recognizing that diversified, sustainable funding – combining municipal appropriations, state and federal grants, private philanthropy, and innovative finance tools – is essential for conservation programs that can survive budget cycles and respond quickly to time-sensitive opportunities. State programs including Land for Maine’s Future, the Maine Trails Bond, and FEMA Hazard Mitigation grants represent accessible funding pathways for communities with strong plans and demonstrated community support.

For Casco, building implementation capacity means more than securing funding – it means developing the organizational infrastructure to coordinate among the many active players in the town’s open space landscape: the lake associations, Loon Echo Land Trust, the Portland Water District, Crooked River Snowmobile Club, Lakes Region ATV Club, Casco’s Safe Streets Committee, the Water Quality Committee, local businesses, and the volunteer trail maintenance community. Creative conservation finance tools including transfer development fees and conservation subdivision design, both of which can fund rural land protection while accommodating needed housing growth are also identified as mechanisms worth exploring. Adding a young adult representative to the Casco Open Space Commission would strengthen the body’s connection to the next generation of Casco residents who will inherit the landscapes this plan seeks to protect.

PLANNING HORIZON

The COSP is intended to serve as a 10-year strategic blueprint for conservation, recreation, and natural resource stewardship.

This planning horizon balances the need for a long-term vision with the flexibility to adapt to changing conditions, emerging opportunities, and evolving community priorities. Establishing a decade-long horizon aligns the COSP with typical municipal planning cycles, supports coordination with the Casco Comprehensive Plan and capital planning processes, and provides sufficient time to implement large-scale conservation, trail development, and stewardship initiatives.

Within this 10-year timeframe:

Near-term actions (Years 1–3) should focus on *building the foundation for implementation* including:

- formalizing conservation priorities,
- establishing landowner outreach and easement conversations,
- understanding funding availability and cycles,
- advancing early “quick win” projects such as signage, trailhead improvements,
- formalizing public access to existing town and conserved properties, and
- begin updating land use regulations (zoning, site plan review, etc.) and enforcement practices.

Mid-term actions (Years 4–7) should focus on *on-the-ground implementation*, including:

- targeted land acquisitions and easements,
- expansion and connection of the trail and water access network,
- infrastructure improvements such as parking and wayfinding,
- strengthening habitat connectivity (culvert upgrades and wildlife crossings),
- investments that protect water quality, and
- improving safe access between villages, natural areas, and other destinations.

Long-term actions (Years 8–10) should focus on *sustaining and refining the open space network* by:

- consolidating conservation gains,
- completing larger regional connections and corridor projects,
- updating policies and ordinances to strengthen environmental protections,
- scaling stewardship and maintenance programs, and
- evaluating the need to update priorities, funding strategies, and partnerships for the next planning cycle.

By structuring the plan around this extended horizon, the Town of Casco can ensure that short-term efforts contribute to broader, systemic goals.

IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

The COSP establishes a clear path from vision to action. While the preceding sections of this plan present important open space findings, and provide guidance for future conservation, recreation, and stewardship, the implementation phase is where Casco’s priorities are translated into tangible outcomes on the ground. Protecting water quality, expanding trail connections, conserving priority lands, and strengthening partnerships will require sustained coordination, strategic investment, and ongoing community involvement over time.

The actions identified in this plan are intended to serve as a starting point and a practical roadmap for the Town, the Casco Open Space Commission, and local partners. Some actions can be undertaken immediately through low-cost or partnership-based initiatives, while others will require longer-term planning, funding, or coordination across multiple boards and organizations.

Implementation is designed to be phased and flexible. Actions are also identified by timeframe to reflect realistic sequencing—beginning with foundational work such as relationship-building and priority setting; followed by targeted acquisitions and infrastructure investments; and culminating in long-term stewardship, policy refinement, and system-wide improvements. This approach allows the Town to also respond to opportunities as they arise while maintaining progress toward long-range goals.

The following table presents the full list of recommended actions, organized by theme and timeframe. Together, these actions provide a living framework to guide decision-making, budgeting, partnerships, and day-to-day stewardship of Casco’s open space network over the next decade and beyond.



#	Action
Goal 1. Conserve and Protect Casco's Unique Landscapes and Water Resources	
1.1	Prioritize land conservation efforts that safeguard historical, wild, working, and water-rich landscapes, with a strong emphasis on protecting water quality in lakes, ponds, rivers, and wetlands.
1.2	Prevent development sprawl through conservation and land use ordinances by coordinating an interconnected open space network that radiates from our villages and expands access to trails and waterbodies.
1.3	Keep large, in-tact forested blocks available and uninterrupted for wildlife passage and ecological health through conservation and land use ordinances. Areas for consideration include Jugtown Forest, Hacker's Hill Preserve, Rattlesnake Mountain, Pine Hill Wilderness, Hancock lumber lands, and the undeveloped areas between Routes 11, 121 and 302.
1.4	Conserve wetlands and marsh systems that support biodiversity, water filtration, flood storage, and sustain habitat. Areas for consideration include wetlands near The Heath, areas across from Webbs Mills, and wetlands behind the Hancock Mill on Route 11.
1.5	Develop a Natural Resource Inventory to offer additional evidence for identifying conservation and recreation priorities.
1.6	Establish a Water Quality Commission to meet the goal of maintaining and/or improving the water quality of Casco's water resources. Also, the Commission would focus on implementing the 2026 Water Quality Plan.
1.7	Establish regular check-ins with water-quality monitoring organizations for updates on water quality within Casco's waterbodies including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thompson Lake Environmental Association (TLEA) (Thompson Pond) 2. Oxford County Soil & Water Conservation District (Thompson Pond, Pleasant Lake) 3. Pleasant Land and Parker Pond Association (Pleasant Lake and Parker Pond) 4. Thomas Pond Improvement Association (Thomas Pond) 5. Cumberland County Soil & Water Conservation District (Thomas Pond, Parker Pond, Coffee Pond, Dumpling Pond) 6. Crescent Lake Watershed Association (Crescent Lake)
1.8	Inquire if stewardship and water-quality monitoring organizations would consider adding additional waterbodies in Casco to their monitoring program.
1.9	Protect moderately developed shorelines, private shoreline buffers, and conserved forestland along waterbodies to preserve the clarity, habitat quality, and scenic character of Casco's "blue spaces".
1.10	Consider adding a watershed protection zone 1/4 to 1/2 mile. out from the shoreland zone to further protect water resources outside of the shoreland area.
1.11	Formally conserve the group of town-owned properties classified as "Conserve & Enhance" properties by the Casco Open Space Commission. These properties include:
1.11A	State Park Road Property Map-lot 001A-0002 & 0003-0036 Inventory map #15
1.11B	Libby Road Map-lot 0004-0019-A Inventory map #19
1.11C	Lilly Brook Property Map-lot 0042-0022-B Inventory map #27

#	Action
1.11D	70-Acre Wood Map-lot 0002-0003 Inventory map #29
1.12	Expand and connect, through direct land acquisition or easement, the existing network of conserved lands in areas such as Owl Pond, Rattlesnake Mountain, Pine Hill, and lands between major roadways.
1.12A	Collaborate with Loon Echo Land Trust to work with private landowners to make these expansions/connections and protect lakefront areas. The Casco Open Space Commission is aware of many individuals that are open to conversations regarding easements and/or public access, and the relationships should be fostered delicately.
1.13	Deepen the relationship with any camps or former camp landowners that have expressed an interest in working with the Town to expand the existing open space and recreation network.
1.14	Using the climate resilience map, identify and secure proactive land acquisitions to combat climate change (i.e., lands adjacent to waterbodies or high elevation areas).
1.15	Acquire and manage land to address erosion concerns in problem areas using the climate resilience map and any other relevant maps as a guide.
1.16	Identify and secure land acquisitions or enhancements designed for youth-friendly gathering spaces such as parks or waterfront hangouts and areas where teens and others feel safe, are well-maintained, and are easy to reach from schools and other public places.
1.17	Convene an annual or bi-annual summit of surrounding communities including but not limited to Raymond, Naples, Otisfield, and Poland to collaborate on conservation and recreation efforts in the region.
1.18	Identify and secure, through acquisition or easement, conservation corridors essential for wildlife continuity and long-term ecosystem resilience including connecting major open spaces including links between Rolfe Hill and Rattlesnake Mountain, between Pleasant Lake and Thompson Lake, and from Sebago Lake State Park toward village areas.
1.19	Inventory and map all properties in current use to understand the pattern of working lands in Casco, and the potential for future land conservation. This would need to be revised regularly as current use land continually changes.
1.20	Incentivize landowners to keep their land as open space through tree growth or open space current use tax programs.
1.21	Coordinate with Beginning with Habitat and other agencies/partners for site visits to survey lands and determine what resources may be present.
Goal 2. Enhance Connectivity and Expand Access for People and Wildlife	
2.1	Develop a refined trail network with safe on- and off-road connections linking villages, waterways, conserved lands, and other destinations.
2.2	Expand open space infrastructure—including parking, wayfinding, trails, and both trail and water access points—to support recreation and improved access.
2.3	Advocate for formal public access on private conservation easements (i.e., LELT).
2.4	Develop a Trails Alliance to map, maintain, build and link existing and new trails for both machine-powered and non-machine use.
2.5	Identify process and protocols for the development of multi-use trails and connections that can serve walkers, bikers, skiers, and motorized uses while promoting safe, shared access. Ensure Casco's Safe Streets Committee is involved in any multi-use trail discussions.

#	Action
2.6	<p>Integrate safe wildlife crossing measures in areas with high concentrations of wildlife-vehicle collisions (WVSc) including along Poland Spring Road, Meadow Road, and Roosevelt Trail. Examples of safe wildlife crossing measures include, but are not limited to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Structures, usually underneath roadways, that incorporate guide fencing to funnel wildlife to the crossing. 2. Altering habitat to remove attractants (i.e., salt pools that may attract ungulates, nesting habitat, forage locations). 3. Reducing driver speed by way of narrowing roadways, adding speedbumps, reducing speed limits. 4. Integrate reactive signage to warn drivers of potential wildlife (i.e., flashing lights during high-probability times or placing signs for only parts of the year).
2.7	Update culverts to Stream Smart design to restore connectivity for aquatic species whose navigation is often impaired by culverts that are too small, perched too high, transporting water at too high a velocity, or are crushed. (Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, Begin with Habitat program)
2.8	Work to increase conserved and publicly accessible lands in northern and eastern parts of town to balance the distribution of the existing network.
2.9	Work to formalize any informal entry points – boat launches, beaches, swimming spots – to Casco’s blue spaces (lakes, ponds, rivers).
2.10	Work to formalize the recreational and scenic benefits of the island within Parker Pond, which is vulnerable to restricted access, to ensure community use in the future.
2.11	Work to formalize public access throughout the recreational trail network. Many trails in Casco are informal and/or unmarked, which means it is vulnerable to access restrictions. Creating landowner agreements or using regional initiatives such as the 2020 Traction on the Trails and the Maine Trails Bond provide frameworks for Casco to formalize trail access and play a stronger role in regional recreation planning.
2.12	Expand non-motorized (hiking and mountain biking) and universally accessible trail options as much of the existing network is intended primarily for snowmobile and ATV use.
2.13	Improve signage throughout Casco’s trail network and consider a cohesive branding program.
2.14	Work with trail user groups to develop a cohesive and collaborative trail maintenance program that is agreed upon and adhered to.
2.15	Align land acquisition and/or trail development/maintenance with Casco’s Safe Streets Committee to ensure collaboration and shared goals
2.15A	Identify areas where residents and visitors may feel unsafe due to traffic, lack of lighting, or poor visibility such as Route 11 and Route 302. (Outreach report)
2.15B	Add sidewalks, bike-friendly routes, and after-school shuttles between villages and to specific destinations to increase safety and accessibility. (Outreach report)
2.15C	Align these efforts with the vehicle crash data provided by Maine Inland Fisheries & Wildlife
2.16	Expand the trail network between Pike’s Corner and Casco Village, Parker Pond, Berry Property, Jugtown Forest, Pine Hill, Webbs Mills, Rolfe Hill, Rattlesnake Mountain, and other destinations, including loops around Parker Pond.
2.16A	Ensure maintenance of any expanded trails is understood and planned before construction.
2.17	Improve parking at access points, including Owl Pond, and implement clearer trailhead markings, additional trail maps and signage about land ownership, permitted uses, and wildlife habitat.

#	Action
2.18	Refine, build on, and prioritize a specific list of identified wildlife crossing locations. This list can be found in Table 2 on page 79. Use the list outlined in the Outreach Report as a starting point and work to reduce/limit fragmentation effects.
2.19	Refine, build on, and prioritize a specific list of identified trail and recreation enhancements using the list outlined in the Outreach Report as a starting point. This list can be found in Table 3 on page 79.
2.20	Refine, build on, and prioritize a specific list of identified transportation barriers and improvements using the list outlined in the Outreach Report as a starting point. This list can be found in Table 4 on page 80.
Goal 3. Lead as a Resilient, Strategic, and Well-Resourced Community	
3.1	Consider proactive land acquisitions to combat climate change by referencing the climate resilience map as a starting point (i.e., lands adjacent to waterbodies or high elevation areas).
3.2	Strengthen Casco's implementation capacity by partnering with regional organizations, major landowners, and the community to advance land use and open space priorities.
3.3	Refine, build on, and prioritize a specific list of identified climate resilience improvements using the list outlined in the Outreach Report as a starting point. This list can be found in Table 5 on page 80.
3.4	Review Casco's Ordinances to identify ways to increase environmental protections including but not limited to shoreline buffer distances for development along waterbodies and stormwater management regulations for public and private roads. The resulting revisions should be aligned with state and regional recommendations.
3.5	Update culverts to Stream Smart design to become more resilient to climate change. Work with inland fisheries and other state agencies to replace culverts that block fish migration.
3.6	Participate in regional conservation efforts such as through the protection of key habitat blocks in the Crooked River watershed ensures local conservation goals contribute to broader watershed and biodiversity outcomes. Regional efforts include the 2011 Lake Region Greenprint, the 2025-2035 State Wildlife Action Plan, and the work of Sebago Clean Waters that offer technical tools, funding pathways, and science-based strategies municipalities can use to help guide local decisions.
3.7	Align local recreation planning with statewide priorities that link outdoor access, conservation, and economic development. The State of Maine's 10-Year Outdoor Recreation Economy Roadmap provides a framework for achieving this. By aligning Casco's recreational and open space planning with the State's Roadmap, the Town could pursue state-supported funding opportunities, grants, and partnerships associated with Maine's outdoor recreation economy initiatives
3.8	Seek creative funding sources including the Maine Trails Bond that funds trail development, trail maintenance, and land acquisition for trail development.
3.9	Consider adding a young adult representative to the Casco Open Space Commission.
Goal 4. Strengthen Community Identity and Economic Vitality Through Education and Stewardship	
4.1	Create materials and programs that (1) highlight Casco's open space and recreational networks and (2) help communicate with and educate residents and visitors about land use, development, conservation, water quality protection, and recreation initiatives and opportunities.
4.2	Increase outdoor learning opportunities and facilities including playgrounds that remain open throughout the year.
4.3	Attract families and outdoor enthusiasts by enhancing Casco's reputation as a connected, water-rich, and recreation-oriented community that stands apart from others in the region.

#	Action
4.4	Work to strengthen the relationship between Casco's open space and recreational network and the villages within town.
4.5	Recognize the importance of the Crooked River as a large and defining community resource along with Sebago Lake and the other waterbodies.
4.6	Determine the status of the ongoing feasibility study for the town-owned Berry Property, located on the southwestern shore of Parker Pond behind the Public Safety complex, that was referenced in the 2024 Comprehensive Plan.
4.7	Develop long-term plan for the Berry Property that meets the needs of the community while also strengthening linkages between Casco Village and the Town's open space network.
4.8	Create a centralized and easy-to-share source of information about local recreation and open space options such as a website, map, or educational resource that summarizes trails, open spaces, and parking locations. If distributed to the business community, it would allow the tourism industry to confidently direct guests to appropriate public areas.
4.9	Partner and connect with regional outdoor-based organizations to promote Casco's – and the regions – outdoor recreational economy. Use the existing relationships with Loon Echo Land Trust and others to explore this option.
4.10	Strengthen Casco's economic vitality by encouraging access and visitation to waterbodies, waterways, and conserved and open space lands.
4.11	Consider land acquisitions or enhancements to develop dog parks and dog-friendly trails where dogs are safe to run and dog owners can congregate and build community.
4.12	<p>Establish a committee to determine the ultimate use and management of many town-owned properties. As part of this process, the committee could convene a series of localized, neighborhood-scale forums to get feedback on the future direction of each particular property. The list of properties in need of future direction include, but are not limited to the following. Specific property information is included in Table 6 on page 81.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Manning Field 2. State Park Road Property 3. Berry Property 4. Libby Road 4. Lake Shore Drive 5. Varney Road 6. 15 Varney Road 3 Dadmun Drive 4. Lilly Brook Property 5. Point Sebago Road 6. 70-Acre Wood
4.13	Incorporate creative strategies to protect natural areas and concentrate development to growth areas. Methods like transfer development fees (developers pay an extra fee to increase density in growth areas; the fee is used to purchase conservation land in rural zones) and conservation and limited development projects (where rural land is subdivided and sales of the subdivisions are used to fund acquisition and protection of the larger undeveloped parcels, frequently done in conjunction with land trusts) are effective for improving housing stock while protecting large amounts of land.

TABLES REFERENCED IN IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

The following tables are referenced in the matrix above and are intended to further inform implementation efforts in Casco.

Table 2: Wildlife Crossing Locations Identified During Public Outreach (see Action 2.17)	
#	Location
1	Mayberry Hill Road and Heath Road , between the Mayberry Hill Preserve and the protected parcel on Heath Road.
2	Leach Hill Road and Route 11 , where a crossing would link Jugtown Forest with adjacent Hancock Lumber parcels.
3	Leach Hill Road and West Fountain Hill Road , indicating movement between forest and open space on each side.
4	Route 121 at Parker Pond , with a note suggesting seasonal turtle-nesting warning signs.
5	Mayberry Hill Road near Pleasant Lake , where respondents noted frequent wildlife crossing activity.

Table 3: Trail Improvements and Recreation Enhancements Identified During Public Outreach (see Action 2.18)	
#	Desired Improvement or Enhancement
1	Migis Lodge Area: Interest in exploring expanded trail access from Manning Field to the lakefront at Migis Lodge.
2	70-Acre Wood: Loon Echo Land Trust circled this property, noting they were unaware it was town-owned conserved land and are interested in helping the Town develop signage, formal access, mapped trails, and potentially funding support
3	Pine Hill Wilderness: Community members highlighted the need to maintain older trails, restore forgotten routes, and add additional trails.
4	Rattlesnake Mountain Wilderness: Identified as an area needing trail development and long-term protection.
5	Route 302 to Rolfe Hill Forest: A desired trail was drawn connecting Route 302 to Rolfe Hill Forest, then extending toward the Rattlesnake Mountain Wilderness and ultimately to Webbs Mills Village.
6	Old Johnson Hill Road: Marked as an important location for potential landowner conversations to support trail development.
7	Between Sebago Haven Road and Ring Landing: Circled as an area with “great bones” for walking trails, trailheads, and better-defined access.
8	Large Town-Wide Loop Concept: Participants illustrated interest in a long-distance loop trail connecting major waterbodies and destinations—such as Crescent Lake, Coffee Pond, Thomas Pond, Sebago Lake, Pleasant Lake, Parker Pond, Thompson Lake, and back to Crescent Lake.
9	Crooked River (near the Naples town line): Marked for improved public access to the river for recreation, viewing, and low-impact use.
10	Berry Property: Highlighted as a priority location for improved recreation amenities, including parking, signage, and trail access consistent with previous feedback.
11	Hancock Lumber Parcel (northern Casco near Heath Road/Heath Island): Interest in expanded public access, recreational trail opportunities, and potential collaboration with the landowner.
12	ATV Trail Connection (Pike’s Corner to Hancock parcel via Stone Road): Marked to improve connectivity, maintenance, and clarified routing along this identified ATV corridor.
13	Pleasant Lake Beach & Boat Ramp: Interest indicated a need to enhance infrastructure such as parking, signage, or shoreline access to support recreational use.
14	The Heath Area: Identified as a place to improve public access.

Table 4: Transportation Barriers and Improvements Identified During Public Outreach (see Action 2.19)

#	Barriers and/or Desired Improvements
1	Bike Lanes and Multi-Use Paths: Desired connections between Webbs Mills, Pike’s Corner, and Casco Village using Poland Spring Road, Route 121, and Mayberry Hill Road into Otisfield.
2	Sidewalk Gaps: Marked needs for sidewalks along: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Route 121 in Casco Village near Pleasant Lake • Pike’s Corner • Webbs Mills Village • From Mayberry Hill Road at the Otisfield town line through Casco Village to Pike’s Corner
3	Road Safety Concerns: Coffee Pond Road and Poland Spring Road near the northern point of Coffee Pond were identified as dangerous for cyclists.
4	Route 121 Maintenance: Notes highlighted roadway maintenance needs between the Raymond town line and Pike’s Corner, including improving shoulders and repairing pavement.
5	Park-and-Ride Need: A location near the Raymond town line on Route 121 was circled, suggesting a small park-and-ride for people traveling north toward Otisfield, Hanson, and Oxford.
6	Trail Access Issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking and signage improvements are needed at Owl Pond. • ATV trails near northwest Pike’s Corner were marked as needing maintenance. • Trails between Pike’s Corner and Cooks Mills were noted for maintenance needs and improved mapping.

Table 5: Climate Resilience Concerns Identified During Public Outreach (see Action 3.3)

#	Concern
1	Consider lakefronts, ponds, streams, and wetlands as top priorities for their stormwater management benefits and ability to aid in erosion control.
2	Emphasize the importance of the Crooked River watershed for its climate resilience benefits and highlight vulnerable areas where erosion, flood events, nearby development, and road crossings may be impacted. Specific climate resilience concerns should be explored around the elementary school and South Casco.
3	Address areas at risk of erosion from steep slopes including but not limited to Mayberry Hill Road, Leach Hill Road, Quaker Ridge, powerline/Leach Hill areas, Sonny Maines Road, and roadside slopes near Pine Hill. Stabilization and vegetative cover could help reduce erosion in these areas. Living shoreline practices can help shoreline stabilization projects.
4	High-risk watershed connections and village areas: Areas around Route 121-302 corridor, Webb’s Mills village (runoff issues from Pine Hill), Casco Village, and areas where stormwater flows toward Pleasant Lake or Parker Pond.
5	Town beach and waterfront access points: Pleasant Lake/Casco Town Beach and public waterfront areas were identified for shoreline protection, stormwater controls, and erosion management.
6	Rolfe Hill Forest (southeast and northwest portions): Areas where slopes, runoff patterns, and erosion concerns were frequently noted.
7	Quaker Ridge Road near Hancock Family Farm: Identified for stormwater issues and hill-slope runoff during heavy rain events.
8	Meadow Road (Route 121) near Parker Pond: Marked as an area with roadway washouts, drainage challenges, and shoreline impacts.
9	Intersection of Webbs Mills Road (Route 85) and Route 11: Highlighted for frequent flooding and poor drainage during major storms.
10	Upper Shore Drive near Thompson Pond: Identified for shoreline flooding, erosion, and stormwater runoff concerns.

Table 6: List of Properties in Need of Future Direction (see Action 4.12)	
#	Concern
1	Manning Field (Map-lot 16-5-COMM, Inventory map #11)
2	State Park Road Property (Map-lot 001A-0002 & 0003-0036, Inventory map #15) The Casco Open Space Commission determined this property should be classified as a “Conserve & Enhance” property to never be sold. However, the future direction of the property still needs to be determined.
3	Berry Property (Map-lot 0038-0032, 0038-0032-0001, 0038-0019, Inventory map #17)
4	Libby Road (Map-lot 0004-0019-A, Inventory map #19) The Casco Open Space Commission determined this property should be classified as a “Conserve & Enhance” property to never be sold. However, the future direction of the property still needs to be determined.
5	Lake Shore Drive (Map-lot 0020-0070-A, Inventory map #23)
6	Varney Road (Map-lot 0027-0005, Inventory map #24)
7	15 Varney Road (Map-lot 0027-0006, Inventory map #25)
8	Dadmun Drive (Map-lot 0031-0010-A, Inventory map #26)
9	Lilly Brook Property (Map-lot 0042-0022-B, Inventory map #27) The Casco Open Space Commission determined this property should be classified as a “Conserve & Enhance” property to never be sold. However, the future direction of the property still needs to be determined.
10	Point Sebago Road (Map-lot 0001-0008-0001, Inventory map #28)
11	70-Acre Wood (Map-lot 0002-0003, Inventory map #29) The Casco Open Space Commission determined this property should be classified as a “Conserve & Enhance” property to never be sold. However, the future direction of the property still needs to be determined.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Maine Dept. of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry: Land for Maine's Future

The Land for Maine's Future program provides matching grants (typically up to 50% of project costs) to state agencies and partners to fund the acquisition and permanent conservation of land and interests in land that support outdoor recreation, public access, working lands, and high-value natural and ecological resources across Maine.

[Conservation & Recreation Funds:](#)

The Land for Maine's Future Conservation & Recreation Funds provide matching grants to state agencies and partners to support the acquisition of land or interests in land that protect high-value natural resources while expanding public outdoor recreation access, conserving wildlife habitat, scenic areas, and working forests.

[Public Access to Maine's Waters Fund:](#)

The Land for Maine's Future Public Access to Maine Waters Fund provides matching grants to state agencies and partners to acquire land or access rights that create or improve public access points to lakes, rivers, and coastal waters for activities like boating, fishing, and swimming.

[Working Waterfront Access Protection Program:](#)

The Land for Maine's Future Working Waterfront Access Protection Program provides matching grants to businesses, municipalities, and nonprofits to fund the purchase of working waterfront properties or development rights that permanently protect and secure access for commercial fishing and aquaculture use

[Working Farmland Access Protection Program:](#)

The Land for Maine's Future Working Farmland Access Protection Program provides grants to state agencies, land trusts, and partners to fund the purchase of agricultural conservation easements that permanently protect high-value farmland, support active farming, and sustain Maine's agricultural economy

[Access Improvement Grants:](#)

The Land for Maine's Future Access Improvement Grants provide matching grants to landowners of LMF-funded properties to fund small capital projects—such as trails, parking, boat launches, signage, and access roads—that improve public access and usability of conserved lands.

[Capital Improvement Grants:](#)

The Land for Maine's Future Capital Improvement Grants provide matching grants to support construction and major improvements—such as infrastructure, facilities, and access-related upgrades—on publicly accessible conserved lands to enhance recreation, conservation, and public use.

Maine Dept. of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry: Bureau of Parks and Lands

[ATV Grants \(club and municipal\):](#)

The Maine ATV Grants (club and municipal) program provides funding to ATV clubs and municipalities to support the development, maintenance, and improvement of designated ATV trails and related infrastructure to enhance safe, sustainable recreational riding access across Maine.

[Boating Facilities Fund:](#)

The Maine Boating Facilities Fund provides matching grants to municipalities and public entities to plan, develop, and improve public boating access facilities—such as boat ramps, docks, floats, parking areas, and related infrastructure—to enhance safe and accessible water recreation across Maine.

[Snowmobile Grants \(club, municipal, capital, and disaster relief\):](#)

The Maine Snowmobile Grants program provides funding to snowmobile clubs and municipalities (including capital projects and disaster relief) to support the development, maintenance, and improvement of designated snowmobile trails and related infrastructure to ensure safe, sustainable winter recreation across Maine.

[Land and Water Conservation Fund:](#)

The Maine Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program provides matching grants to state and local governments to create and improve public outdoor recreation areas—such as parks, trails, and conservation lands—while also supporting the protection of natural resources across Maine.

[Maine Trails Program:](#)

The Maine Trails Program provides matching grants to municipalities, nonprofits, and trail organizations to support the planning, development, maintenance, and improvement of multi-use trails that expand safe and sustainable outdoor recreation access across Maine.

[Recreational Trails Program:](#)

The Maine Recreational Trails Program provides matching grants to municipalities, nonprofits, and trail organizations to develop, maintain, and improve motorized and non-motorized recreational trails—such as hiking, biking, snowmobile, and ATV trails—while enhancing safety, access, and sustainable trail systems across the state.

[Forest Legacy Program:](#)

The Maine Forest Legacy Program works in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service to provide funding and conservation easements that protect environmentally important forest lands from development while keeping them working forests that support timber production, recreation, wildlife habitat, and public benefits.

Maine Dept. of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry: Commissioner's Office

[Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund](#)

The Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund (MOHF) is a state-funded grant program supported by a dedicated lottery ticket that provides competitive grants to conserve wildlife, protect endangered species and habitats, acquire and manage public lands, and promote outdoor recreation and natural resource conservation projects across Maine.

Maine Environmental Education Association: [Mini Grants for Outdoor Learning](#)

The Maine Environmental Education Association's Mini Grants for Outdoor Learning provide small (up to about \$1,500) grants to Maine public schools and teachers to fund projects that expand outdoor and environmental learning—such as equipment, supplies, field experiences, and professional development that help students learn in and about nature

The Nature Conservancy:

[Resilient & Connected Appalachians Grant Program](#)

The Nature Conservancy Resilient & Connected Appalachians Grant Program provides grants (up to about \$100,000) to nonprofits, municipalities, and partners to fund land acquisition and related costs that permanently protect and connect climate-resilient habitats across the Appalachian region while benefiting biodiversity and local communities.

[Maine Natural Resource Conservation Program](#)

The Nature Conservancy's Maine Natural Resource Conservation Program provides competitive grants to nonprofits, municipalities, and agencies to fund projects that restore, enhance, or permanently protect high-priority wetlands, streams, and aquatic habitats across Maine.

Northern Forest Center: [Community Recreation Grant](#)

The Northern Forest Center's Community Recreation Grant Program provides small grants (typically about \$1,500–\$3,000) to communities, schools, and nonprofits to fund projects that increase access to outdoor recreation—especially for youth—by reducing barriers, supporting programs, and promoting stewardship and public health.

Other funding locations to consider:

[Maine Land Trust Network](#)

The Maine Land Trust Network (MLTN) provides funding resources and grant opportunities to support Maine land trusts—helping them secure grants, build capacity, and advance land conservation projects, including land protection, stewardship, collaboration, and related conservation initiatives.

APPENDIX

Open Space Inventory (corresponds with Map on page 17)			
Map #	Property Name	Entity (land owner/manager)	Acres
1	Sebago Lake State Park	"Landowner: Maine Bureau of Parks & Lands"	651
2	Rolfe Hill Forest	"Landowner: Loon Echo Land Trust"	398
3	Mayberry Hill Preserve	"Landowner: Loon Echo Land Trust"	142
4	Hacker's Hill Preserve	"Landowner: Loon Echo Land Trust"	26
5	Briar Sands	"Landowner: Private Easement: Loon Echo Land Trust"	13
6	Helen Allen Farm	"Landowner: Private Easement: Loon Echo Land Trust"	57
7	Le Messurier	"Landowner: Private Easement: Loon Echo Land Trust"	28
8	Maplebrook Farm	"Landowner: Private Easement: Loon Echo Land Trust"	58
9	Dingley Field	Landowner: Town of Casco	3
10	Hancock Memorial Field	Landowner: Town of Casco	7
11	Manning Field	Landowner: Town of Casco	17
12	Webb's Mills Park	Landowner: Town of Casco	1
13	Casco Village Complex	Landowner: Town of Casco	4
14	Village Green	Landowner: Town of Casco	1
15	State Park Road Property	Landowner: Town of Casco	50
16	Town Courts	Landowner: Town of Casco	0.88
17	Berry Property	Landowner: Town of Casco	11
18	637 Meadow Road	Landowner: Town of Casco	4
19	Libby Road	Landowner: Town of Casco	44
20	Tenney Hill Road	Landowner: Town of Casco	5
21	Transfer Station & Bulky Waste	Landowner: Town of Casco	26
22	Sand & Salt Shed	Landowner: Town of Casco	11
23	Lake Shore Drive	Landowner: Town of Casco	0.1
24	Varney Road	Landowner: Town of Casco	0.1
25	15 Varney Road	Landowner: Town of Casco	0.3
26	3 Dadmun Drive	Landowner: Town of Casco	0.6
27	Lilly Brook Property	Landowner: Town of Casco	8

28	Point Sebago Road	Landowner: Town of Casco	3
29	70-Acre Wood	Landowner: Town of Casco	69
30	Crooked River Elementary School	Landowner: MSAD 61	28
31	Crescent Beach	Landowner: Town of Casco	0.4
32	Pleasant Lake Beach	Landowner: Town of Casco	0.1
33	Crooked River Access	Landowner: Private	0
34	Coffee Pond Boat Launch	Landowner: Town of Casco	--
35	Pleasant Lake Boat Launch	Landowner: Town of Casco	--
36	Parker Pond Boat Launch	Landowner: Private	--
37	Thompson Lake Boat Launch	Landowner: Private	--
38	Thomas Pond Public Boat Launch	Landowner: Located in Town of Raymond	--
39	Sebago State Park Boat Launch	"Landowner: Maine Bureau of Parks & Lands"	--
40	Camp Cedar	Landowner: Camp Cedar, Inc	24
41	Camp Agawam	Landowner: Camp Agawam	22
42	Wohelo Camp	Landowner: Camp Luther Gulick	2
	Former Camp Netop	Landowner: *Doug Webster	95
43	Camp Sunshine	"Landowner: Camp Sunshine at Sebago Lake"	8
44	Camp Laurel South	"Landowner: Casco Properties, LLC"	91
45	Hoop Camp	Landowner: Malcolm Philbrook, Jr.	48
46	Jugtown Forest	"Landowner: Hancock Lumber Easement: Maine Bureau of Parks & Lands"	650
47	Rattlesnake Mountain Wilderness	"Landowner: Hancock, Inc"	829
48	0004-0002	HANCOCK INC M S	807
49	0006-0010-A	HANCOCK LAND COMPANY, INC	27
50	0006-0010	HANCOCK LAND COMPANY, INC	2
51	0005-0031	HANCOCK LAND COMPANY, INC	490
52	0005-0030	HANCOCK LEASING LTD LIABILITY CO	34
53	0008-0017-2	HANCOCK BRIDGTON, LLC	2
54	0008-0017-3	HANCOCK LEASING, LLC	8
55	0007-0007	HANCOCK-SAMA LTD LIABILITY CO	3

56	0008-0026	HANCOCK LAND COMPANY, INC	5
57	0008-0017	HANCOCK LAND, INC	335
58	0043-0023-A1	HANCOCK LEASING LIMITED LIABILITY CO	0.1
59	0043-0023-A2	HANCOCK LEASING LIMITED LIABILITY CO	0.1
61	0043-0023-A4	HANCOCK LEASING LIMITED LIABILITY CO	0.1
62	0043-0023-A5	HANCOCK LEASING LIMITED LIABILITY CO	0.1
63	0043-0002	HANCOCK LEASING, LLC	0.1
64	0043-0026-1	HANCOCK LEASING LTD LIABILITY CO	0.1
65	0011-0017-8	HANCOCK LAND COMPANY	1
66	0049-0006	HANCOCK LAND COMPANY, INC	2
67	0010-0002-3	HANCOCK LAND COMPANY	17
68	0011-0014-A	HANCOCK LAND COMPANY, INC	14
69	0006-0007	HANCOCK, INC M S	41
70	0005-0063	HANCOCK, INC M S	121
71	0005-0038	HANCOCK, INC M S	142
72	0006-0014	HANCOCK, INC M S	44
73	0006-0021	HANCOCK, INC M S	1
74	0008-0004	HANCOCK, INC M S	23
75	0003-0015-1	CASCO TIMBER COMPANY INC	323
76	0005-0023	CASCO TIMBER COMPANY INC	0.5
77	0005-0027	CASCO TIMBER COMPANY INC	20
78	0008-0047	CASCO TIMBER COMPANY INC	68
79	0009-0007	CASCO TIMBER COMPANY INC	32
80	"Pine Hill Wilderness (aka Owl Pond Wilderness)"	CASCO TIMBER COMPANY INC	501
81	0009-0025-B	CASCO TIMBER COMPANY INC	40
82	0009-0031	CASCO TIMBER COMPANY INC	65
83	0009-0030	CASCO TIMBER COMPANY INC	48
84	0009-0005	CASCO TIMBER COMPANY INC	193
85	0011-0018-A	CASCO TIMBER COMPANY INC	6
86	0011-0018-B	CASCO TIMBER COMPANY INC	5

87	0009-0004	CASCO TIMBER COMPANY INC	132
88	0011-0017	CASCO TIMBER COMPANY INC	19
89	"Rattlesnake Mountain: Access from Raymond"	"Landowner: Fred Jr. & Laurie Huntress"	135
90	Parcel 0045-0026	"Landowner: Maine Minor Civil Division"	2
91	Murch Cemetery	Unknown	3.5
92	Green Grove Cemetery	Unknown	1.4
93	Lakeside Cemetery	Unknown	5
94	Manning Cemetery	Landowner: Private	0.4
95	Tubbs Family Cemetery	Landowner: Private	0.1
96	Tenney Hill Cemetery	Unknown	1
97	Maxfield Cemetery	Unknown	0.2
98	Webb's Mills Cemetery	Landowner: Private	1
99	Mountain View Cemetery	Landowner: Private	0.4
100	Edwards Cemetery	Landowner: Unknown	0.1
101	Cook Pinkham Cemetery	Landowner: Private	0.1
102	Mayberry Hill Cemetery	Landowner: Private	Unknown
103	Jordan Family Cemetery	Landowner: Private	Unknown
104	Freedom Chute Cemetery	Landowner: Private	0.1
--	Brackett Cemetery	Landowner: Private	Unknown
--	Daniel Fickett Family Burial Ground	Landowner: Private	Unknown
--	Johnson Hill Cemetery	Landowner: Private	Unknown
--	Old Bridgton Road Cemetery	Landowner: Private	Unknown
--	Quaker Ridge Cemetery	Landowner: Private	Unknown
--	Riggs Road Cemetery	Landowner: Private	Unknown
--	Stimson Cemetery	Landowner: Private	Unknown
--	Top of Mayberry Hill Cemetery	Landowner: Private	Unknown