

CELEBRATING PLACE: 30th Anniversary Notes from Blue Hill Heritage Trust

The Bagaduce

By Jim Dow, Executive Director, Blue Hill Heritage Trust

Our Peninsula landscape abounds with remarkable natural features, some well-known, some not. One of its most significant features falls among the less known: the Bagaduce River, a wildlife-rich estuarine system with an extensive and varied upland watershed. Now there are conservation lands with trails that will give more people a chance to appreciate this river and its watershed.

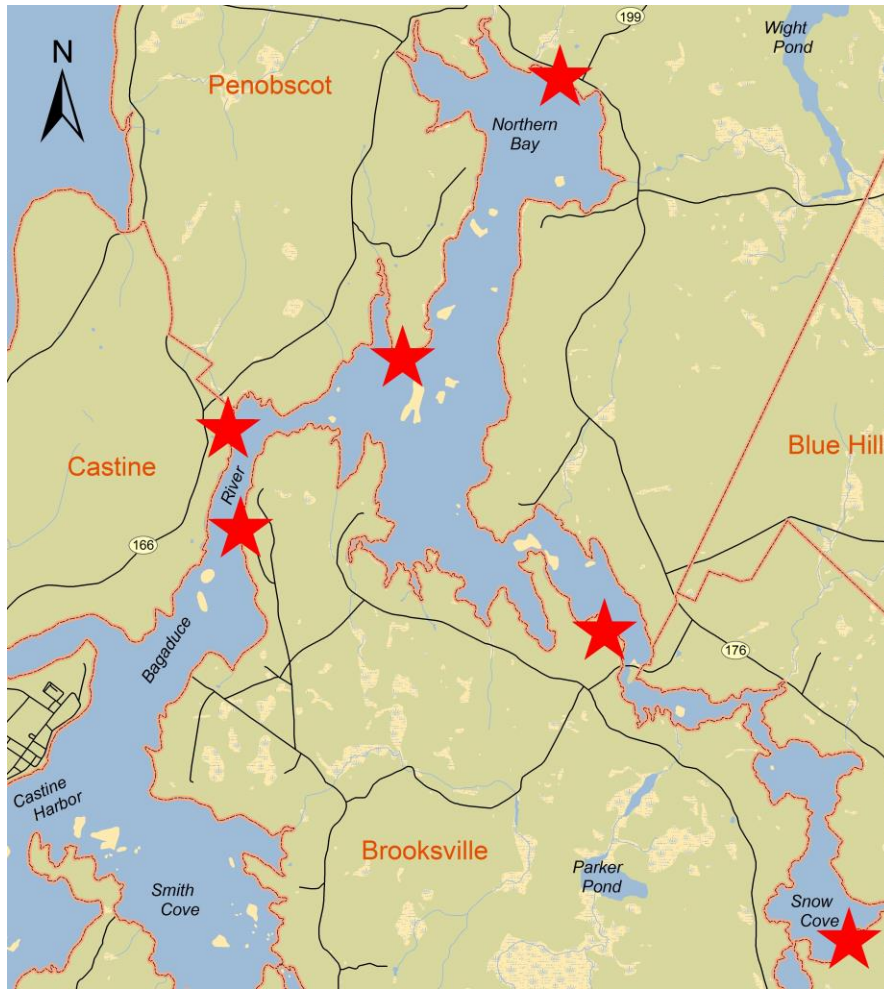
Our Trust has long understood the significance of the Bagaduce. The State of Maine has as well – its Beginning with Habitat Program identified the Bagaduce River as an ecological focus area of state significance some years ago because of its significant marine and intertidal habitat. Perhaps because the river is not readily visible from most public roads and has not, until relatively recently, had public access points along its course, it has been largely overlooked by the general public, though deeply appreciated by shorefront owners, fishermen and other users of the river.

Beyond the 12 mile tidal river itself, the Bagaduce has a watershed that drains about 52,400 acres, more than a third of the Blue Hill Peninsula, providing the fresh water that gives the Bagaduce River its productive estuarine character. That large watershed also provides habitat for a wide diversity of plants and animal species.

From a conservation perspective, the Bagaduce has presented some challenges, for a couple of primary reasons. First, the river itself is a marine and estuarine system, its waters owned by the people of the State of Maine and its use regulated by state government agencies. The conservation tools that land trusts like ours use – land acquisition and conservation easements, through transactions with private landowners in the free-market system – are not directly applicable to some of the conservation issues that presented themselves on such water bodies. Second, much of the river's shorefront land is expensive; as oceanfront land values soared and became in more limited supply, Bagaduce frontage became an alternative place for new home development. Today much of the river's shoreline has been developed for residential uses.

Despite these challenges, we and our partners, most notably Maine Coast Heritage Trust (MCHT), have had some real success, particularly in the last few years, both on the main stem of the river and as well as in its watershed, using our traditional land conservation tools.

There is now “a string of pearls” of conservation lands along the Bagaduce River that protect wildlife habitat and scenic values. Just as importantly, these lands provide the public access to the shores of the Bagaduce at various points along the river, from its headwaters to its mouth, offering residents and visitors the opportunity to become familiar with it and thus to value it.



Here are some names: Snow's Cove Preserve in Sedgwick, Snow Natural Area and Ferry Landing in Brooksville, Sherm Perkins Park and Tills Point in Penobscot, the Lampson Preserve in Castine and Ferry Landing in Brooksville. All have public walking trails. (Maps and direction scan be found on our website or in our printed trail guide.) In addition there small boat access sites in Brooksville, one at the Reversing Falls and one on Smith Cove, and one in Penobscot, on northern bay, that allow people to get out on the water.

The river's watershed also has some outstanding features, including a variety of ponds and streams, the Peninsula's largest wetland system, its largest peat bog and its second highest mountain. Aided by a grant from the North American Wetlands Act program that was focused on the conservation of wetlands providing habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife , we recently worked with cooperative landowners to complete a series of projects in the watershed.

Our niche in the conservation of the Bagaduce is land. We have been criticized for not engaging in regulatory issues, such as recent oyster aquaculture leasing decisions by the state, but that is not our expertise or within our capacity. The Bagaduce would certainly benefit from an active and enduring local organization that collected natural resource and use information and served as an informed voice in research, regulatory, and legislative matters affecting the river and its watershed. Perhaps in the future we can help with this.

As we continue our Bagaduce work, we look forward to introducing more places for people to walk and explore its natural features. In the meantime, we hope you will walk the trails that already exist, and get to know and appreciate this magnificent part of our Peninsula.



Photo caption: Conservation lands along the Bagaduce provide public access to the river. Here children and adults explore the shore at the Trust's Snow Natural Area in Brooksville.