

Great Bay- Piscataqua WATERKEEPER®

CONSERVATION LAW FOUNDATION



Cynthia Irwin

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For a thriving Great Bay Estuary



Meet Your Waterkeeper

As CLF's Great Bay-Piscataqua Waterkeeper, Peter Wellenberger is working hard to protect the health of Great Bay, the Piscataqua River, and all the waters comprising the Great Bay estuary. (See reverse side for a map.) Having managed the Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve for more than twenty years, where he advanced estuarine research and monitoring, habitat restoration, public education and outreach, and trained coastal decision-makers, Peter is well equipped to tackle the challenges threatening the estuary and to work with concerned citizens and other organizations to secure needed protections.

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Nestled between New Hampshire and Maine, the Great Bay estuary is one of New England's most remarkable natural resources. Here, fresh water from numerous rivers mixes with saltwater tides to create a natural treasure in the heart of New Hampshire's Seacoast region — one rich in fish and birds, as well as wonderful recreational opportunities for Seacoast residents and visitors alike. While its ecological and recreational value is immeasurable, the future of the Great Bay estuary is uncertain.

The Challenges

Pollution is pushing the Great Bay estuary to the brink. Outdated sewage treatment plants and sprawl development are creating conditions that threaten the health of the estuary's waters and that have led to troubling signs of stress. Eelgrass — a plant that grows in underwater meadows and that serves as the cornerstone of the estuary's ecosystem — has been decimated in the Piscataqua River, Little Bay and other waters, and is declining in Great Bay. Oysters, which provide important water quality and habitat functions, also have declined precipitously. The threats of water pollution in the Great Bay estuary are not unlike those that have led to the collapse of other estuaries, such as Chesapeake Bay. In light of existing trends, we're in a race to protect the Great Bay estuary from a similar future.

The Solutions

Building a Voice for the Bay

The tremendous value of the Great Bay estuary — and the threats it is facing — are not well-known to many people in the Seacoast region. A key focus of CLF's Great Bay-Piscataqua Waterkeeper, Peter Wellenberger,

is to better engage the public in efforts needed to clean up the estuary's waters and to secure a healthy future for Great Bay — now and for future generations.

Advocating Innovative Solutions

Upgrades to sewage treatment plants (there are 18 of them affecting the estuary) and tackling the pollution problems caused by stormwater runoff are essential to restoring the health of the estuary. Peter will be working with stakeholders to identify and advance needed solutions, including innovative approaches to reducing stormwater pollution, which can contain a host of pollutants, such as oil, metals, nutrients and bacteria.

Being the "Eyes and Ears" of the Estuary

Whether on the water, or through relationships with people and partners throughout the Seacoast, Peter will be on the look-out for existing or new water pollution problems to ensure those problems are cleaned up and that the Great Bay estuary has the full protection of the Clean Water Act and other environmental laws.

KEY WORK

HELP US PROTECT THE ESTUARY

CLF's Great Bay-Piscataqua Waterkeeper program can take on the major threats facing our treasured waters only with the support of people like you. Please help by becoming a member of CLF today. Use the "Donate" button at clf.org, or contact Devon Parish at dparish@clf.org.

STAY INFORMED

Visit clf.org/great-bay-waterkeeper to learn more about the estuary and to sign up for Great Bay Currents, a monthly email newsletter with news and insights from the Great Bay-Piscataqua Waterkeeper.

REPORT POLLUTION

Have you witnessed pollution in Great Bay, the Piscataqua River, or other waters in the estuary? If so, contact our Great Bay-Piscataqua Waterkeeper, Peter Wellenberger. Make sure to include in your report details regarding the location, date, and type of pollution, if known.

CONTACT

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A HISTORY OF ADVOCACY AND INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR THE ESTUARY



Implementing Innovative Solutions to Deal with Pollution

- We worked with a major developer and the UNH Stormwater Center to redesign a proposed retail center – on the banks of Pickering Brook in Greenland – to incorporate innovative stormwater solutions, including the largest installation of “porous pavement” in New England and an innovative stormwater treatment system to significantly reduce nitrogen and other pollutants.
- As a result of CLF's efforts, the EPA is requiring a massive scrap metal facility in Portsmouth to stop discharging toxic stormwater runoff – including mercury and PCBs – into the Piscataqua River.



Securing Protections for Clean Water

- As a direct result of CLF's advocacy, the State of New Hampshire and the EPA listed nearly all of the Great Bay estuary as impaired as a result of excessive nitrogen pollution and / or eelgrass loss, entitling the estuary to greater regulatory protection.
- CLF's advocacy has led the EPA to address the problem of nitrogen pollution from sewage treatment plants, using the Clean Water Act to propose much needed pollution reductions.
- CLF's advocacy caused EPA to reverse a decision that would have allowed Portsmouth's Peirce Island sewage treatment plant to operate with only “primary” treatment levels as opposed to more protective “secondary” treatment required by the Clean Water Act.

