

# NEW DIRECTIONS



Charting a Course for a Sustainable Community on Cobscook Bay, Maine

**A MESSAGE FROM THE SUSTAINABLE COBSCOOK GROUP AND THE  
SUSTAINABLE COBSCOOK COMMUNITY ALLIANCE**

The following document is intended to stimulate interest in our project, promote an understanding of sustainable development, and increase awareness of how best to nurture our community.

We hope that whatever your area of interest, we have succeeded in expanding the way you view the world, or at least your part of it.

June, 1994

"New Directions" is a working document prepared with technical assistance from the Sunrise County Economic Council, 1 Stackpole Rd., PO Box 679, Machias, Maine 04654-0679. Revisions will be made periodically.

Revised: January, 1995; July, 1995, October, 1995; October, 1996; October, 1998, May, 2001, September, 2001.

## Sustainable Development on Cobscook Bay.

Sustainable economic development improves the quality of the economy without sacrificing the quality of the natural environment, or the ability of communities to protect, nurture and educate their citizens.

In order for our citizens to live well today, and keep our quality of life intact for future generations, we must recognize that the economy, the environment, our communities and our education are all connected, related, and must be developed as parts of a whole system.

This system is life on Cobscook Bay.

## **THE COBSCOOK BAY COMMUNITY**

The waters of the Atlantic Ocean converge in Cobscook Bay, a small but significant marine ecosystem in Eastern Maine. Located just south and west of Passamaquoddy and Fundy Bays, which link Maine to New Brunswick, Canada, the Bay is formed by many smaller bays and estuaries, fed by the Dennys, Orange and Pennamaquan Rivers. The Cobscook Bay area comprises the easternmost area of Washington County and Maine.

A total of nine communities are situated on the rim of the Bay: Eastport, Pleasant Point, Perry, Pembroke, Dennysville, Edmunds, Whiting, Trescott and Lubec. Of these, the largest towns, Lubec and Eastport, are separated by about 2 miles across the Bay, and about 40 miles by land. West Quoddy Head in Lubec is the easternmost point of land in the continental United States.

The history of the area is entrenched in the renown both Lubec and Eastport once enjoyed as leaders in the lucrative sardine industry in the 19th and early 20th centuries. About 40 factories thrived in the two communities in 1899, as homes, businesses and families were built with the wealth they generated. With the eventual near demise of this industry, the area's economy plummeted. The area lost population, wealth, and a proud way of life.

Those families remaining in the area survived by again relying on the generosity of the Cobscook Bay to provide their means, turning to clam harvesting, and lobster and other fishing. Today, salmon aquaculture, fishing, and sea urchin harvesting are significant sources of income for area residents, but the largest employers are in public service fields and light manufacturing. Eastport enjoys a deep sea port, with Domtar (formerly Georgia Pacific) as its primary customer. The port is increasing its significance as it strives to diversify its export client base and prepare for expansion with its new pier at Estes Head.

Between the towns that dot the Bay are thousands of acres of pristine woodlands, including a portion of Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge, and wild blueberry fields. The economy of the Cobscook Bay area, as the rest of Washington County, is based on natural resources: fish harvested from the Bay, wild blueberries harvested from the hundreds acres of fields in the area, forest products, including logs, pulpwood and evergreen wreaths, and tourism.

Cobscook Bay is widely recognized as a unique marine ecosystem and natural habitat for scores of wild animals, shorebirds, waterfowl, bald eagles, and marine and forest wild life. Many species are studied and analyzed by groups and individuals all over the United States.

The area's greatest resource is the people who populate the communities. Eastport and Lubec, with 1,640 and 1,652 people respectively, are the two largest towns. The smallest town, Dennysville, has a population of 319, and two smaller communities are unorganized townships. All together, just over 6,407 souls live on the threshold of the Cobscook Bay.

The people of the area represent an enormous amount of skill, talent and knowledge contributed both by natives and newcomers. Many families in the area have been here for generations, and are instinctively aware of the importance of tradition and inherent knowledge. In particular, the area's Passamaquoddy tribe of Native Americans represents a wealth of indigenous heritage and customs. Many other people have moved to the area because they appreciate the simple lifestyle and intimacy of small communities, and contribute a new array of skills, interests and perspectives.

The people of the Cobscook Bay community share more than a common body of water. They hold an inherent respect for the natural environment that provides them with beauty, serenity, and livelihoods. They value the sense of sharing, friendliness, and resourcefulness that make up their communities, and they recognize the commonalities that make each separate community part of a larger one: the Cobscook Bay Community. They strive for means, to provide for themselves and their families, to allow them to enjoy and appreciate the area's qualities. And they are determined to provide the best quality education for their young people that they can support.

## **THE CHALLENGES**

While the Cobscook Bay area has many attributes that make it a handsome and enjoyable area that indeed epitomizes the phrase "quality of life" to its residents, there are many struggles.

The lack of significant economic development, combined with resulting long-term reliance on government entitlement programs, threatens all the qualities the people here wish to maintain: their livelihoods, their precious natural environment, their communities, their educational systems. Also, most people are concerned that the wrong types of economic development could be a threat to those things as well.

Many fear that commonly accepted practices of managing blueberry crops and forested lands threaten water and soil quality, and yet these industries represent a significant portion of the area's economy. Traditional fishing requires access to common fishing areas, creating a struggle to share the waters of the bay with the emerging aquaculture industry, which relies on leased sites. Many believe well-intended efforts to create public lands may inadvertently undermine the efforts of municipalities to meet the needs of their citizens by depleting the local tax base, yet public lands are regarded as having great importance to the future of the area's tourism industry. The combination of shrinking municipal revenue, and cutbacks in state funding have seriously threatened the quality of education these towns are able to finance. Towns unable to provide quality education and job opportunities face losing their most precious resource as their children grow up and leave the area.

In spite of the best efforts to counter these problems by a number of worthwhile and earnest local efforts, community groups themselves have challenges that relate to their location and the culture of the area.

A very common factor contributing to the ineffectiveness of small organizations in Washington County is lack of paid staff. Only a few local organizations have survived and been successful without paid staff at some time or in some form. The lack of a large population from which to draw volunteers results in a few people doing a great majority of work in the community, contributing to burnout.

Additionally, community groups who are not communicating with each other often duplicate effort, both in projects and research. Because members of volunteer organizations lack the time to communicate and coordinate regularly with other groups, information is gathered that is not shared, ideas often germinate but are never brought to fruition. Individuals, especially young people and newcomers, are unaware of community groups that may be able to use their energy and ideas. And business ideas abound, waiting to be connected with the "right" person, and access to resources to help develop the business idea.

All these factors seem to contribute to a hopeless myriad of complex problems. In order to address all these challenges, communities must be willing to look at things in a more comprehensive and inclusive way, and initiate improvements that help address all the values in their community collectively.

## **SUSTAINABLE COBSCOOK**

In response to this challenge, with resources provided by the Ford Foundation, a small but committed group of citizens from the communities on Cobscook Bay formed the "Sustainable Cobscook" group, to determine how sustainable development on Cobscook Bay can be achieved. They invested hundreds of hours of volunteer time to examine how the many important and sensitive needs of the area could be balanced, and the quality of life enhanced.

In order for the Cobscook Bay Community to be sustainable, the group made a commitment to promote and monitor the health of the four things the citizens of the Cobscook Bay area value most: the economy, the natural environment, the quality of education and the sense of community and cooperation in and among towns. As a monitor, a series of several measurements, called indicators, were explored: data such as the percentage of seasonal employment variation and the dollar value of local fish landings will be used to measure the area's economic health; figures on such things as nesting eagles who successfully reproduce, and the presence of certain toxins in the Bay will indicate the health of the environment; the presence and vitality of a ferry service between communities, and the number of groups with regional interest are among things that will be examined to determine the level of community and cooperation; and information such as MSEA test scores and adult literacy rates will be tracked to indicate the quality of local educational systems.

The value of measurements is their ability to give history about a situation, and to help determine if and when success has been achieved. If, for instance, it is found that the area's adult literacy rate is historically well below the rest of Maine, they will hope to see that percentage rate climb over the years. If a goal is set to reach a certain percentage of

literate adults in a number of years, the measurements will tell when that has been achieved.

The question remained, however, how to reach those goals, and maintain the things citizens cherish while improving the things that disappoint.

## **NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE COBSCOOK BAY**

Fortunately, the area has enjoyed many community organizations that help impact all areas of concern: school boards, paid and volunteer municipal officials, chambers of commerce, historical societies, the Quoddy Spill Prevention Group, Lubec: Beginning of America, the Eastport Port Authority, the Sunrise County Economic Council, the Washington County Technical College Marine Trades Center, the Maine Aquaculture Innovation Center, the University of Maine at Machias, the Quoddy Regional Land Trust, and the Quoddy Tides Foundation to name a few. Additionally, there are many individuals of all ages and life experiences who are interested in helping in some way.

Ideas, energy and enthusiasm are in great supply. What is in short supply are resources, both financial and human. While financial resources can be introduced in a variety of ways, human resources are much more difficult to inject into an area. The answer, naturally, is to make most efficient use of the resources you have by coordinating them and accessing their collective knowledge, creating a way to bring together people, ideas, information and money.

The Sustainable Cobscook process began in 1993, as part of the Northern New England Sustainable Communities Project. Within a year, the community had identified their common values, put tremendous effort into developing meaningful and measurable indicators, and organized into working groups to identify and influence local initiatives that could advance all community values together.

The most difficult issue the group faced was organizing a way to provide oversight to the effort. Some felt a more traditional, formal governing structure was necessary, while others liked the informal, inclusive way the group had been operating during its planning stages. The former group formed the Sustainable Cobscook Community Alliance, an alliance of community interests, comprised of individuals committed to the development of a sustainable community around Cobscook Bay.

The function of the Sustainable Cobscook Community Alliance was to facilitate the translation of good ideas into actions that promote the long term health of the community. It did this by connecting people to ideas, people to people and people to financial resources. It facilitated the implementation of projects conceived by other groups or individuals and initiated projects on its own. Its choice of projects in which to become involved was guided by the fundamental goal of developing a sustainable community around Cobscook Bay.

Unfortunately, since the governing structure of the alliance didn't have unanimous support within the initial working group, leadership and control were issues that remained unresolved until the group finally disbanded at the end of the Sustainable Communities project in 1998. However, in the interim, the loose coalition in the community spread their newfound approach to economic development throughout the region, leading by example, in town halls, schools, businesses, and in community meeting rooms.

## **MAKING THINGS HAPPEN**

A list of draft indicators to measure the sustainability of the Cobscook Bay was compiled by the Sustainable Cobscook group, and an effort was initiated to research historic data on those indicators to establish trends, evaluate their importance, and analyze the relationships between indicators.

The Alliance also invested in networking and seminars to continue to learn more about efforts all over the country that could help achieve the goals of sustainable development for the Cobscook Bay area.

The majority of the projects supported by the Sustainable Cobscook effort over the years were the result of four working groups that used their access to funds to motivate people in the community to think about projects in new ways. These four task forces were to identify and support projects that dealt holistically with each of the four value areas. Each task force recruited other members from the community and operated with a few simple guiding principles:

1. To educate themselves and the community about sustainability
2. To support and/or initiate projects relevant to their respective value area
3. To demonstrate how each project impacts *all four value areas*
4. To understand how projects may impact indicators

Examples of resulting project investments and initiatives follow:

### **Education Committee**

#### *Conference on Adult Literacy*

The Education Committee supported training of three local adult literacy teachers, one each from Eastport, Lubec, and Pleasant Point by funding attendance at an adult literacy conference.

#### *Environmental Teaching Seminar*

One important component of sustainability in this area is to develop understanding and appreciation of the Cobscook Bay as a unique ecosystem and vital economic support



system, especially in young people. One good way to reach young people is through their teachers.

A local teacher who had conducted award winning programs in science developed a five-day seminar that gave teachers a working knowledge of the Cobscook Bay area and provided hands on training in marine science, field studies and aquaculture, to enable them to use the Cobscook Bay as a classroom. There were also efforts to link the seminar to Elderhostel programs, local adult education and eco-tourism development efforts.

The Education Committee, along with the three other task forces, contributed funding to support this conference.

#### *Tide Pool Animation Project*

For several years, the Quebec-Labrador Foundation supported a grant to bring a biologist to the Passamaquoddy Tribe's reservation at Pleasant Point to explore the tide pool's biology with area youth. In 1997, a local specialist in computer animation worked with the students to create a visual record illustrating how animals in the tide pool are interrelated. The resulting three dimensional animated image was aired on local television and will serve as a record of natural life unique to Cobscook Bay.

The second phase of this project involved visits to Junior High schools in the Cobscook Bay area to do three-dimensional modeling and simulation experiments with students to explore options for development of the region.

This combination of technology and ecological and economic understanding was funded with support from the Education Committee.

## **Environmental Working Group**

### *Cobscook Bay Clam Management and Restoration Project*

The common soft shell clam, harvested by hand from tidal flats, is uncommon in its importance to life on Cobscook Bay. Its presence represents not only environmental quality, but also is linked to the local economy, and in continuing the tradition of families harvesting the Bay's bounty. In the early 90's, this important industry had reached a dramatic state of decline. Clam population was greatly diminished, and with it many local livelihoods.

An initiative by the steering committee, and facilitated by this task force, proposed a regional management and restoration plan for soft shell clams that combines cooperative water quality protection, municipal ordinances, research and seeding, and other aspects of community based resource management to bring back this natural resource and properly manage it for sustained harvesting and economic benefit.

The project, which combines resources of local volunteer groups and local science students and teachers with a professional coordinator, was funded by the Nature Conservancy, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the Cox Charitable Trust. Additional funds for equipment were provided by the Partners in Monitoring program, through the Maine Community Foundation.

The Cobscook Bay Clam Habitat Restoration and Management Program went on to successfully open 2000 acres of clam flats around Cobscook Bay by improving water quality and local management. This successful project resulted in the formation of the Cobscook Bay Resource Center, an organization that promotes community-based resource management.

### *Recycling Education*

The Environmental Working Group provided funding to develop recycling education materials to be used in class rooms in the Cobscook Bay Community. Books were created containing resource materials specific to the Cobscook Bay region, and suggested classroom activities and long term projects. Teachers in each of four age groups advised on content.

### *Partners in Monitoring Project*

The Environmental group provided matching funds to support the purchase of a computer system for the science department at Eastport's high school. The system will be used to store, analyze, display and communicate water quality data and will be useful in future fundraising efforts by the school's science department. This capacity was also used to assist the Cobscook Bay Clam Restoration and Management Project.

### *Clam Seeding Project*

Funding was provided by this group to support a project to seed clam flats in each of the nine towns around the bay. The project was conducted in cooperation with the Beals Island Regional Shellfish Hatchery, and the Cobscook Bay Clam Habitat Restoration and Management Program.

### *Clam Population Survey Delegation Trip*

Clam population surveys are a good way to understand how state and local restoration efforts are working, but survey requirements by the state are often costly and impractical for small municipalities.

This task force supported a delegation of Cobscook Bay area residents to travel to Augusta to meet with representatives from the Department of Marine Resources to discuss alternatives to current clam survey requirements.

## **Economic Development Action Team**

### *Indicator Research*

The first action of this committee was to enlist assistance from a Senior at the College of the Atlantic to do work on economic indicators for the Cobscook Bay area. Resulting information was made available in narrative form and in tables, and on data base. The information documents basic economic base-line information, and compares the Cobscook Bay area with Washington County and Maine.

### *Quoddy Maritime Museum Hub*

This investment will help launch a tourism and downtown development project by encouraging community participation and planning in a building rehabilitation and museum development project in Eastport. The project will involve the restoration of a run down block in the center of Eastport's waterfront downtown to be developed as a museum "Hub". The Hub will be promoted as part of a multi-community network of cultural, historic and ecological sites in the area. Through organized tours, printed publications and local television programming, the Hub will seek to enhance tourism in the whole area, and use local business networks to identify and capitalize on resulting business opportunities. The Team funding will support start up costs.

### *Cranberry Growers Association*

Several cranberry beds have been installed in the Cobscook Bay area. There was much interest in the industry, which is still emerging and of enormous potential benefit to the economy of the Cobscook Bay area. One deterrent to the development of this industry is the lack of professional technical and business assistance to growers.

The Maine Cranberry Growers Association was attempting to strengthen their professional association, which encourages best practices and integrated pest management among their growers, and hopes to teach other skills to allow entrepreneurs to develop small scale cranberry farms and operate them as viable businesses, adding as much value to the crop as possible, and using as few chemicals as possible.

The Economic Development Action Team's investment enabled the association to help build their professional capacity. To date, one grant application has been completed, and another is planned.

### *Historic McCurdy's Smokehouse*

This local community redevelopment project hopes to renovate the last herring smokehouse in the U.S., and develop the site as a museum, a small scale modern seafood smoking facility, and a community crafts store. Outdoor areas will be available for vendors and public events. The downtown waterfront location of this facility makes it an ideal location to draw people into this community, particularly the hundreds of thousands of tourists who pass through on their way to Roosevelt International Park on Campobello Island, New Brunswick. Proceeds from the store and smokehouse will subsidize the museum's educational and historic preservation activities.

Representatives from this project worked with the Economic Development Action Team to refine the group's plans, and make this a true "sustainable development" project. For example, the managing group, Lubec Landmarks, Inc., is a non-profit organization working to develop sustainable uses for historic and culturally significant sites. The group is committed to paying local property taxes on this and subsequent projects. Keeping the building in the community's realm will also enhance public access to the waterfront, and protect the site from inappropriate development. Sustainable Cobscook also supported the group's fund raising efforts, which allowed them to purchase the building and begin repairs.

Other efforts by this committee include a directory of all area businesses and services, with special focus on smaller, often underutilized cottage industries, to provide information to encourage residents to make local purchases. The committee also invested in a local coordinator to form Working Capital groups.

## **Community/Cooperation Committee**

The distance between Lubec and Eastport is about two miles across the Bay, but the lack of water transportation means a forty-five minute drive between the two towns. Additionally, it is a toll call between the two towns, creating further obstacles to close communication and cooperation all along the Bay. For these reasons, the Community/Cooperation Committee agreed to focus primarily on transportation and infrastructure issues, and to encourage collaboration among local entities whenever possible. This group's insistence on the necessity of a ferry service between Lubec and Eastport, and its vocal pledge of support for this project, encouraged action in the communities.

### *Cobscook Bay Ferry Service*

A committee made up of officials from Lubec and Eastport commissioned a study, with the help of the Eastport Port Authority, to determine if and how a ferry between Lubec and Eastport could function successfully. Central to this concept is a ferry's potential to increase the size and diversity of the local labor market, make the delivery of education more efficient, enhance tourism and save resources. If the two communities do choose to share educational resources, a ferry is critical. This will prevent the loss of local schools, an action that would weaken the identity and structure of the communities. A ferry will also encourage more opportunities for cooperation between Lubec and Eastport, and around Cobscook Bay. The study, completed in April, 1997, did not demonstrate that the ferry could generate enough revenue to sustain an unsubsidized operation. However, as employment trends now show a surplus of jobs in the Eastport area, and a surplus of labor in Lubec, the need for a ferry is being discussed again.

### *Partners in Monitoring*

This committee also supported the Partners in Monitoring Project to bring the same water quality testing capacity to Eastport's high school as Lubec currently has.

## **OUTSIDE THE BOX**

A significant contribution of the Sustainable Cobscook project has been the knowledge and understanding that has gradually permeated the community through participants acting in other capacities, helping to shape plans, and influencing decisions. A new way of thinking about things has been introduced in the community as a result of this project, and that will be its most lasting impact.

In many ways, some direct, some subtle, the project is helping the citizens of Cobscook Bay use their own ideas and values to bring about long term changes for the better, and is beginning to influence the rest of Washington County. Following are a few examples of projects developed apart from the Sustainable Cobscook process, but influenced by some of its participants who are transferring their learning experience into other networks and projects:

*Washington County Leadership Institute* - This was a need expressed often during the planning phase of Sustainable Cobscook. It was later developed by the Maine Development Foundation, University of Maine at Machias, and Sunrise County Economic Council (SCEC). The first session was in January, 1997. The Leadership Institute graduates now number 128.

*Washington County Business/Education Partnership* - Developed by SCEC and the Washington County Consortium for School Improvement to advance the educational, social and economic growth of the Washington County community by creating connections and encouraging the exchange of resources among local business and educational institutions.

*R. J. Peacock, Aquaculture Research* - This local business has invested in a research and development subsidiary to facilitate the aquaculture of marine species that are currently underexploited, before they become overfished. The farming of sea urchins and other bottom culture will contribute to wild stock enhancement as well. Local high school students will participate in all levels of the research and marketing activities that will take place in this effort.

*Cobscook Bay Chamber of Commerce*. Formed in 1999, this organization has institutionalized the concept of the region around Cobscook Bay sharing a common business community.

## **INDICATORS**

While efforts were made to convince municipalities to adopt the measurement and tracking of indicators, high turnover among selectmen and town administrators made this a difficult goal to accomplish. However, the notion of being able to measure progress in meaningful ways was entrenched along with the other fundamental ideas of sustainable development in the region. Some organizations, such as the Cobscook Bay Resource Center, routinely build indicators into individual projects to monitor success in the short and long term. Others appraise activity in the area and quietly acknowledge when another indicator is affected, such as the number of regional organizations forming around Cobscook Bay. People have learned what to look for to know if they are moving in the right direction. Formal measures and reports are no more valuable than that.

## **THE FUTURE OF SUSTAINABLE COBSCOOK**

The participants in the Sustainable Cobscook project came to think of sustainable development as farming: a seed is planted, and if nurtured correctly, will grow and bear fruit. An effort was made, through the formal organizational structure of the Sustainable Cobscook Community Alliance, to create a "controlled farming" method, where seeds are planted in a defined area, and resulting crops are monitored and measured. For whatever reason, this approach was short lived. The final result, in fact the *sustainable* approach, is that seeds were cast to the wind, taking root wherever there was fertile ground. While there may be no one effort or individual identified as being responsible for progress, progress has still been made.

This has resulted in Sustainable Cobscook having a rather random effect, but a more powerful and lasting one because the lessons of sustainable development were allowed to find their own way into the culture of the community.

Town officials now look beyond their municipal boundaries to meet challenges. Businesses understand the importance of balancing their needs with the community and the natural environment. Schools are finding ways to integrate all aspects of the community into their lessons. Through a multitude of small efforts, local people have learned how to manage their activities in a way that will strengthen the economy, environment, education, and a sense of cooperation among communities, and grow a sustainable community, one seed at a time.