

Webhannet River Overview



The Water's Journey

The Webhannet River Watershed is situated entirely in the town of Wells, covering an area of 14 square miles (8,963 acres). Almost square in shape, it predominately drains a sandy outwash plain left by the last glacier. There are four nearly equal contributors that form the watershed; Pope's Creek, Depot Brook, Blacksmith Brook and the Webhannet. All four of these streams start their journeys inland west of the Turnpike and wind their way in an easterly/southeasterly direction crossing Route 1 and flowing into the broad tidal Webhannet estuary. The Webhannet Estuary runs parallel behind the heavily developed barrier beaches (Wells and Drakes Island) and forms Wells Harbor before turning and entering the Gulf of Maine through a pair of jetties constructed in 1963.

Watershed Facts

- Webhannet watershed is located entirely in the town of Wells.
- Of the watershed's 8,963 total acres, 1,510 are conserved.
- Webhannet is the Native American name for the present day Wells region.
- The Webhannet River Estuary consists of 6 streams, 4 of which are named.
- Wells is one of the oldest towns in Maine, incorporated in 1653.
- The town of Wells was once considered to be the clam capitol of Maine.
- Wells showed the highest growth rate and the largest number of new housing units for the entire York County with a 49.4% increase between 1990 and 2000.

Watershed Priorities

- Maintain natural landscapes, minimum water flows and riparian buffers that will benefit water quality while accommodating development.
- Find a workable balance between the commercial/recreation aspects of Wells Harbor, the beaches, and the ecological resources present.
- Follow-up on completed studies to identify and clean-up sources of contamination.
- Understand the impacts of dredging on surrounding marshes and beaches.
- Minimizing negative impacts of residential/commercial shoreline development.

Accomplishments

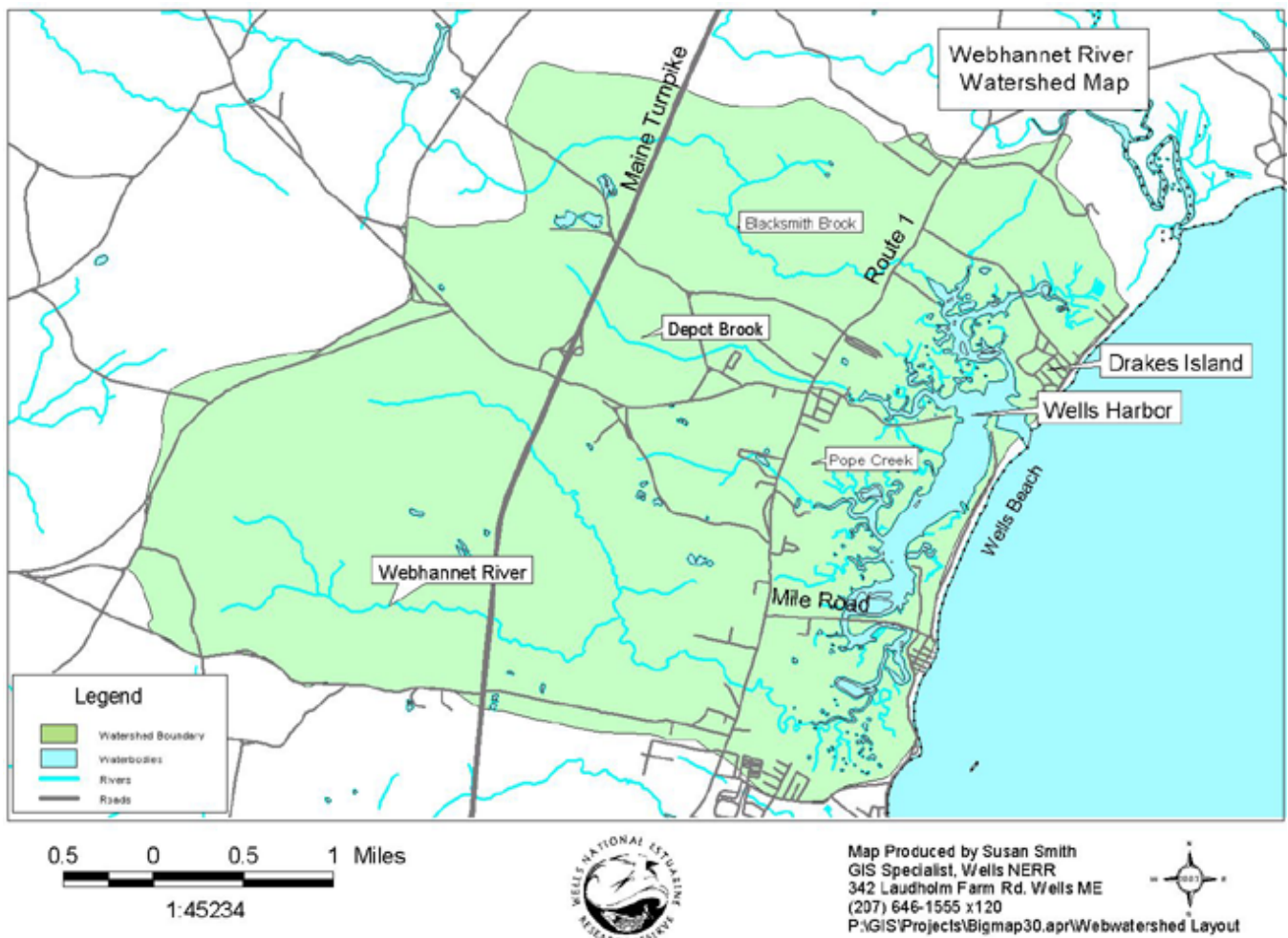
- Clam flats reopened in 1996 after being closed for 10 years
- A shoreland and water quality survey has been completed
- Wells Clam Commission active in management and re-seeding efforts
- 1,167 acres of the estuary salt marsh and uplands have been protected by the Rachel Carson Wildlife Refuge

Projects Underway

- DNA sampling underway to determine sources of contamination
- Water quality of Wells beach being compiled weekly during the swimming season
- Impacts of the 2001 dredging of the harbor area are being monitored
- Expansion of the boundaries of the Wells Reserve to include all of the watershed

Ideas For the Future

- Open space plan for the watershed as part of a town wide effort
- Conduct a fish survey to assess and protect the native fisheries
- Bring protection efforts to the watershed west of Route 1



Watershed Conservation Strategy Reports

This handout was taken from the Webhannet River Watershed Conservation Strategy report, one of seven written for Southern Maine watersheds, produced by the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve in April 2003. The seven watersheds of which a report was written for (from South to North) are Spruce Creek; York River; Cape Neddick River; Ogunquit River; Webhannet River; Merriland River, Branch Brook, and Little River (MBLR); and Nonesuch River. These reports contain information on water quality, land and water use patterns, critical resources, and conservation strategies for each individual watershed listed. The reports also give a list of resources and contacts within the watershed as well as a variety of maps of the watershed.

The purpose of these documents are to provide citizens, land trusts, conservation commissions, and watershed coalitions with a compilation of existing information centered on their watershed. It is a goal that this information will be used to maintain and improve river health and water quality along with the economic, recreational, and community benefits that they provide.

For more information on these reports, please contact the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve at (207) 646-1555. A copy of these reports may also be found at the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve Library located at 342 Laudholm Farm Road in Wells, Maine.

