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Friends of Blue Hill Bay Unveils Map Revisions

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Friends of Blue Hill Bay Project Director Heather Albert-Knopp (right) and MERI Education Director Martha Bell examine a reduced-size version of one of the draft Use Inventory maps introduced to the public at the Blue Hill Public Library last week.—STAFF PHOTO BY STEPHEN RAPPAPORT

BLUE HILL — The Friends of Blue Hill Bay took another step in its efforts to graphically document the waterway's myriad uses last week.

On Thursday, the conservation organization offered the public a first look at the latest revisions to its series of 23 maps that show the many ways Blue Hill Bay is used. The maps also display just how those uses often interact and sometimes conflict.

The organization began its Use Inventory project more than two years ago. Project coordinator Heather Albert-Knopp and a group of volunteers interviewed landowners, fishermen, boaters, academics, scientists and others who currently use and interact with the bay. They also collected a wide range of historical data relating to Blue Hill Bay.

The results of their work are now available on a series of maps produced by the Farmington-based Center for Community GIS. A program of the Quebec-Labrador Foundation, the Center converted raw data — statistical, observed and anecdotal — into a group of colorful and comprehensible maps.

"Heather has done most of the legwork," said Rusty Duym, a Friends director present for the unveiling ceremony.

According to Duym, several of the maps will be on display in the Blue Hill Library in an effort to get more community members interested in the use inventory project, and to tap into the community's knowledge base. Sketch maps will be set out with the maps on display so that community members can add to, or correct, the information represented on the maps.

"This will be an ongoing inventory from this point on," Duym said. "That's why we encourage people to make comments."

So far, much of the data reflected on the maps have come from sources in Blue Hill. The Friends organization hopes to expand those sources. "These are draft maps only," Duym said. "We plan to talk to other affected towns," bordering the bay, "so that it's not just Blue Hill."



Friends of Blue Hill Bay has assembled 23 Use Inventory maps for the waterway, including this map showing current lobster and crab fishing grounds in the bay. The maps are available on the organization's Web site at www.fobhb.org/projects.—STAFF PHOTO BY STEPHEN RAPPAPORT

The Use Inventory encompasses 23 maps, documenting everything from historical fishing and spawning grounds to current summer sailboat racing activities. Eleven maps will be on display at the Blue Hill Public Library. Three maps, showing conserved lands, archaeological sites and recreational destinations along the shore of the bay will not be made public to reduce potential for disruption of those sensitive areas.

The Center for Community GIS is no stranger to Maine waterways. The center has produced a similar set of use inventory maps for Muscongus Bay in the Midcoast area.

That project was funded largely by grants from the State Planning Office.

The Friends had to go another route to cover the cost of producing its maps. The group recently received a grant for GIS (geographic information system) software from the Environmental Systems Research Institute in Redlands, Calif., but it has not received any state or federal funding. All of the costs of the project were covered by gifts from individuals, and by a grant from the Maine Community Foundation.

Friends President Donald Eley expressed his pleasure that the group was finally in a position to make the maps available to the public so they can add to them. He hopes, he said, that the maps will enable all of the individuals and groups concerned with Blue Hill Bay, “use the same language” as they discuss the waterway’s use and future development.

“We really wanted to get this off the ground, get them out there, have that conversation,” Eley said.