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**For Immediate Release:**

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**State of the Estuaries Reports Help Inform Community Land Use Decisions**

The New Hampshire Estuaries Project mailed its State of the Estuaries Report to every planning board and conservation commission member in the 42 communities of the coastal watershed to help citizens understand how their land use policies and activities affect the regional environment. Specific town data on population growth, impervious surfaces, sprawling development rates, and key areas to target for conservation were included in the reports. The timing of this mailing is intended to help better inform communities preparing for town votes in March.

“Findings presented in the State of the Estuaries Report indicate that our estuaries are in relatively good shape compared to others in the nation, however, their future well-being depends on proactive land use decisions that are made at the community level,” notes Jennifer Hunter, Director of the New Hampshire Estuaries Project. “We feel it is important for community board members to understand current trends in water quality and to encourage activities like land conservation and effective stormwater management as they are dealing with continued development pressures. Such activities will not only benefit a community, but protect the environmental integrity of the Seacoast region.”

The report and supplemental community-specific data have been well received by local land use planning boards. Middleton’s Planning Board Chair, Jack Savage, believes the report is a valuable asset to his board. “This report, and especially the specific Middleton data, is useful for us as we update our Master Plan. It helps us identify steps that we can take to ensure good water quality downstream.”

Don Clement, Chair of the Exeter Conservation Commission, is enthusiastic about the resource and its contribution to town planning. “I think the beauty of the report is that it shows how the town’s actions fit into the bigger picture. We are all part of the estuary and when we work together, we protect the overall environment, not just our town’s resources.”

The report was also sent to 39 libraries in the coastal watershed, where in most cases it was made available to the public in the references section. Individuals wanting a copy of the report can contact the NHEP at 603-862-3403 or go online at [www.nhep.unh.edu](http://www.nhep.unh.edu).

The New Hampshire Estuaries Project is a cooperative environmental program involving governmental agencies, universities, non-profit organizations, businesses, and the public to protect, monitor, and enhance the ecological health of the state’s coastal bays and rivers. It is funded in part by a grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency. For more information, go to [www.nhep.unh.edu](http://www.nhep.unh.edu).

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