

## Foreword

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Pleasant Bay, the largest coastal lagoon on Cape Cod, is protected from the Atlantic Ocean by the Nauset Beach barrier island system. Surrounded by more than 40 miles of coastline, the bay's watershed includes the towns of Orleans, Chatham, Harwich, and Brewster. All of these towns have grown dramatically in the more than half century since the 1960s, when the bay was last studied by the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries. This highly valued regional resource is designated by the state and recognized by the 4 surrounding towns as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). A complex and multi-layered ecosystem, the bay is at considerable risk from development within its watershed and from human activities within the bay itself.

The Friends of Pleasant Bay, a grassroots environmental group founded in 1985, includes as one of its missions "To ensure habitat protection and retention of the rich biological diversity and productivity of the bay." Concerned about the impacts of development on the bay and alarmed that so much time had passed since a comprehensive assessment of the bay ecosystem had been conducted, the Friends decided in 2014 to raise the funds needed to carry out such a multi-faceted study.

Unlike in the 1960s, neither the Division of Marine Fisheries nor public funding were available for such an undertaking. Fortunately, however, the intervening years have seen the establishment and growth of the Cape's Center for Coastal Studies (CCS), founded in 1976 with a mission that includes conducting scientific research on the coastal and marine habitats and resources of the Gulf of Maine and promoting stewardship of coastal and marine ecosystems. Among its team of scientists are marine geologists, fisheries researchers, water quality experts, and seal specialists. Together we designed the comprehensive 3-year undertaking that is described in this special issue. Completed in the spring, 2018, this research acknowledges previous work by sampling many of the same niches in the bay studied in the 1960s, in some cases using similar data-collection methods, but expands that frame with the use of much more sophisticated modern methods of both data collection and analysis.

The Friends of Pleasant Bay is committed to insuring that 50 more years do not pass before additional data are collected within and about the bay. The authors of this monograph have provided us with a rich baseline from which to build a longitudinal picture of how our bay is evolving and changing. We are fortunate to have at CCS, scientists not only sophisticated in their scientific methods but also committed to communicating their findings in ways that make them useful to local policy-makers and budding student scientists. We are pleased to see with this special issue that the exciting findings from the marine ecosystem assessment of Pleasant Bay are being shared with a wider scientific audience, and look forward to further collaborations with scientists and resource managers in the near future.

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