

THE HAMPTON-SEABROOK ESTUARY

The Hampton-Seabrook Estuary is a dynamic, lively and expansive ecosystem featuring salt marshes, sand dunes, a barrier beach system, tidal waters, and freshwater streams and rivers. It contains NH's largest continuous area of salt marsh - covering 4,570 acres and NH's last remaining intact dune system. The estuary spans the towns of Hampton, Hampton Falls, and Seabrook, NH, and Salisbury, MA.

Graphic - Map of Estuary

WHAT IS AN ESTUARY?

Estuaries are transitional areas where freshwater from inland streams and rivers mixes with saltwater from the ocean. The daily tides heavily influence the types of vegetation and wildlife that can thrive in this area.

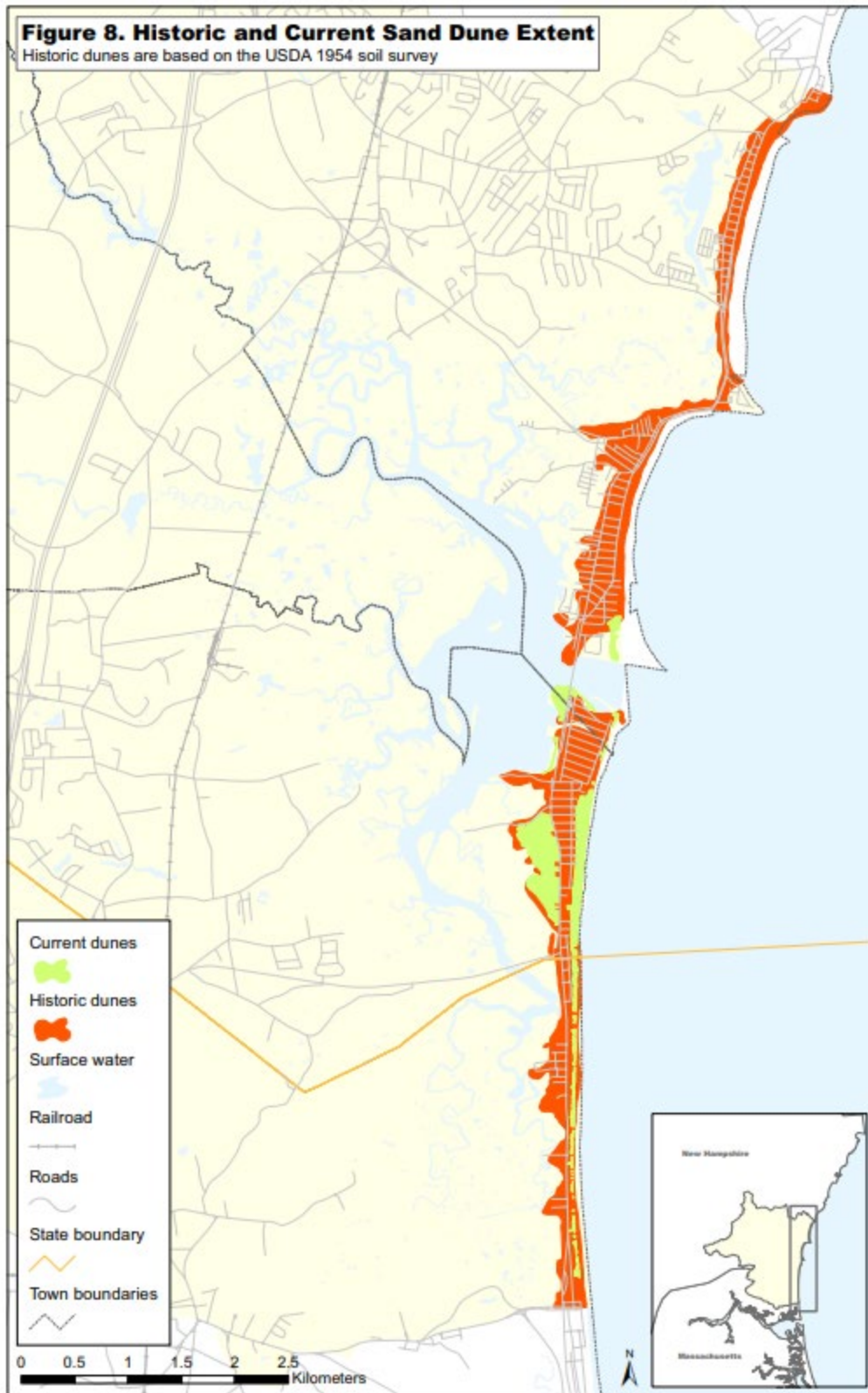
Thousands of species of birds (including the endangered saltmarsh sparrow), mammals, fish, and other wildlife rely on estuaries for living, feeding, and reproducing. Estuaries offer ideal resting and feeding spots for migratory birds. Since many fish and wildlife use these sheltered waters for spawning, estuaries are often called the "nurseries of the sea." With its rich marine life, the estuary offers valuable recreational and commercial opportunities. (<https://www.epa.gov/nep/basic-information-about-estuaries>)

WHAT ARE SAND DUNES?

A sand dune is a mount, hill, or ridge of sand that forms behind some beaches. Dunes build up over many years when wind blows sand from the beach which gets caught by plants and other stationary objects. The grasses that grow on the dunes help hold the sand in place with their roots, and their leaves catch more sand, resulting in more substantial dunes. Without these stabilizing plants, wind and waves regularly alter the form and location of dunes. Dunes are also nature's way of protecting the land—they are built to reduce the wave impacts from storms by eroding away and then rebuild themselves over time.

Dunes are also important habitats for many living things. They provide safe nesting areas for birds like the piping plover and resting spots for migratory birds such as the least sandpiper and snowy owl. Insects like the monarch butterfly also use the dunes. The Seabrook dunes are home to 141 different kinds of plants, including some that are rare and endangered. Seabrook Beach is 1.6 miles long and has the largest sand dune system left in NH. The dunes comprise approximately 109 acres in Seabrook, 30 of which are west of Rt. 1A and are referred to as 'back dunes' The Town has acquired title to the dunes as a means of long-term protection and conservation.

Graphic for consideration (from HSE Compendium)



How Estuary Protect Us

Estuaries and their surrounding wetlands function as buffer zones. They stabilize shorelines and protect coastal areas, inland habitats, and human communities from floods and storm surges. When flooding does occur, peat often acts like huge sponges, soaking up the excess water. Healthy sand dunes are natural buffers that protect landward areas from severe wind and wave action that can damage property.

Yankee Fishermen's Co-Op

The Yankee Fishermen's Cooperative (Co-Op), established in 1990, is a fishermen-owned facility for unloading, processing, and selling locally caught seafood through its on-site retail market. The facility was originally used as a barge facility for the Seabrook nuclear power plant before being transformed into the Co-Op (Mainecoast.com).

The Co-Op is home to several types of fishing industries, including those focused on lobster and tuna. "Groundfishing, the catching of fish that swim in close proximity to the bottom, was the first colonial industry in America" (NOAA). Fishing boats can be seen leaving early in the morning and returning late in the evening to unload their catch. "By continuing to fish, our fishermen are carrying on a four hundred year New Hampshire commercial fishing tradition. Our fishermen are proud of the work they do and will continue to carry on their legacy" (Yankee Co-op website).

Sources

<https://www.mainescoast.com/2021/04/yankee-fishermens-co-op-seabrook-nh/>

[History of New England Groundfishing](#) - NOAA, 2024

<https://yankee-coop.com/about-us>

This project was funded by the US Fish and Wildlife Service via the Wildlife Management Institute (logo)

SHEA logo