

Marine Resources

Overview

Like other southern Maine coastal communities, Ogunquit's coastline is predominantly sandy beaches, with some areas of rocky shoreline and small harbors. The coast serves as the economic backbone of the community and region by drawing in vital tourism dollars and supporting a mix of coastal tourism, recreation, marine-related industry, and commercial fishing. Healthy marine resources are critical to the community. Without well-maintained harbors and healthy beaches, commercial and recreational boat traffic cannot navigate waterways and tourists may choose to spend their money elsewhere, impacting not only the region, but the State as a whole with lost critical revenue and business.

Ogunquit has seen a sustained trend toward recreational use of the ocean and the Ogunquit River, as evidenced by a large number of kayaks, stand-up paddle boards, surfers, canoes and small motorboats. The Footbridge section of Ogunquit Beach does have a "put in" for small recreational watercraft. Commercial fishing vessels, charters, sightseeing boats launch from the Town's working harbor, Perkins Cove.

Coastal Water Quality

Protecting Ogunquit's valuable marine resources requires ongoing attention, continual effort, and adequate resources. The Town has prioritized efforts to protect coastal water quality and address pollutant issues, as outlined in the 'Water Resources' chapter of this plan. FB Environmental Associates (FBE) continues to work with the Town of Ogunquit to monitor water quality in the Ogunquit River, its estuary, and its tributaries. Water quality monitoring takes place each year at consistent sampling locations along the Ogunquit River and smaller tributaries. The monitoring is targeted at documenting changes in bacteria levels within the estuary to evaluate ongoing remediation efforts and help direct future management actions. Annual monitoring has shown continued high levels of bacteria in some locations within the estuary and along Ogunquit's beaches, especially after significant rainfall events, a situation Ogunquit, FBE, the State of Maine, and other partners are working hard to address.

In addition to monitoring, the Town has taken steps to address sources of water quality issues through the Ogunquit River Watershed Restoration Project, which is now in its fourth phase. Components of the project include the installation of a stormwater retrofit catch basin in the Main Beach parking lot. This key infrastructure upgrade provides for enhanced filtration of runoff from the parking lot surface. The project entails continued engagement of the public with outreach and educational activities to improve the awareness around sources of bacteria in the estuary, and what people can do to help.

The Town of Ogunquit works with the Maine Healthy Beaches Program to ensure that Ogunquit's saltwater beaches remain safe and clean. The program performs standardized monitoring of beach water quality, notifying the public of potential health risks and educating residents and visitors on what they can do to help keep the beaches healthy. Moody/North, Footbridge, Main, Riverside and Little Beach in Ogunquit are monitored Memorial Day through Labor Day for a safety threshold of enterococci in marine waters of no greater than 104

MPN/100 ml. The sites tested showed that Little Beach exceeded the threshold three (3) times and Riverside Beach exceeded the threshold four (4) times in 2022. Advisories were posted but no beach closures occurred.

Water-Dependent Use

The Town of Ogunquit aims to strike a balance between the needs of working fishermen and recreational and development pressures in its management of coastal areas. Traditional water uses, such as fishing and clamming, continue to thrive, especially in the area of Ogunquit Beach.

Perkins Cove, which was once called Fish Cove, near the unnavigable Josias River, was a major source of fishing in the early 1900s, but the Cove was unprotected by a headland or breakwater from Atlantic storms, so fishermen had to protect their boats by hauling them ashore each night. Resolving to create a safe anchorage, they formed the Fish Cove Harbor Association, and dug a channel across land they purchased to connect Fish Cove with the Josias River. When the trench was complete, erosion helped to further widen the passage. The resulting tidewater basin is called Perkins Cove, spanned by a manually operated draw footbridge.



Photo 1 Perkins Cove

Today, Perkins Cove is still home of Ogunquit's active commercial, recreational fishing fleets and lobstermen. **Table 1** below shows the active number of commercial and recreational fishing licenses issued by the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) in Ogunquit in 2020.

Commercial Fishing Licenses (Single & Crew)	Commercial Lobster/Crab Licenses	Commercial Shellfish Licenses	Total Commercial and Recreational Fishing Licenses
5 (12 crew)	19	0	82

Table 1 Commercial and Recreational Fishing Licenses by Town. (Source: Maine Department of Marine Resources, 2020 license data)

Perkins Cove is also home to numerous restaurants and retail businesses. The Cove was and still remains a thriving destination for artists. Perkins Cove is at the southern terminus of the Marginal Way, a cliff walk that meanders for a little over one mile along the ocean.

The Ogunquit Estuary is a source of clamming. Soft shell clams are a native species that live in mud, sand and gravel intertidal areas in the Ogunquit Estuary. It takes about three to four years for a clam to grow to legal size, which is two inches (2'). Soft shelled clams are regulated by Maine DMR, the Town Shellfish Conservation Commission, and Town ordinances. Ogunquit

requires recreational licenses which can be obtained through the Town office. The recreational limit is 1 peck, or roughly 12 pounds, per person daily. There is no commercial shellfishing in Ogunquit. DMR monitors the clam flats for the presence of fecal coliform bacteria and closes the flats to harvest when bacteria count rises above a certain level. These are called "water quality closures" which are different from Red Tide closures. The Town Shellfish Conservation Commission and DMR Area Biologist evaluate the status of the shellfish resource and other factors to determine whether the clam flat area should be opened or closed for harvesting. Signage is posted along the estuary when a clam flat is closed.



Photo 2 Ogunquit Estuary

Threats to Ogunquit's marine resources include water quality issues as described in the Water Resources chapter, storms, aging infrastructure, and climate change. While sea level rise and coastal flooding threaten both commercial and recreational fishing activity through direct impacts to wharf infrastructure and access to that infrastructure, there are additional climate-related impacts to marine resources. Water quality issues negatively impact coastal wildlife, including commercially harvested species. Additionally, climate change causes both warming and acidification of marine waters. The Gulf of Maine is warming faster than 99% of the world's oceans. Ocean acidity levels have already risen 30% and will continue rising alongside growing greenhouse gas levels. Ocean acidification has already impacted some shellfish harvesting operations in Maine and will increasingly affect marine organisms that produce calcium carbonate to build shells, such as oysters, scallops, clams, mussels, and sea urchins. These combined climate impacts will lead to some marine species migrating northward to colder water and disappearing from traditional fishing grounds. This is expected to reduce regional catches and associated revenue for fishermen. Further, Ogunquit's recreational shellfishing activities could be impacted.



Photo 3 Ogunquit Beach

Access to coastal and marine resources is vital for Ogunquit's residents, businesses, and visitors. There are several parking and access points in town, including the Perkins Cove public parking area and boat launch, Main Beach, Footbridge Beach and North Beach and their municipal parking lots. A 2022 regional coastal vulnerability assessment by Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission (SMPDC) showed that most of those parking areas are projected to experience flooding from future sea level rise and storms. Main Beach parking lot has

400 spaces and Footbridge Beach and North Beach entrance each have 190 spaces. Handicap parking is available in all public parking lots, plus public toilets. Parking is a significant source of Town revenue.

According to Town documents, Perkins Cove has approximately 83 parking spaces consisting of paid parking (meter credit card only), 2-hour free parking as posted, and parking reserved for commercial activities. There are 43 paid parking spaces (numbered spaces) that are limited to three hours maximum and approximately 26 two-hour free spaces located aside the footbridge and in the boatyard. It has been noted that parking at Perkins Cove does not meet the demand of the area. There is adequate parking for commercial fisherman in the Cove but not members of the public. There are no opportunities for improved access due to limited land. There are public toilets in the Cove.

Harbor, Marinas, and Vessels

Ogunquit has only one working harbor, which is Perkins Cove ("Cove" herein) and the waters therein. The only municipal wharf is in the Cove. Perkins Cove has a public boat ramp for launching and taking out watercraft at the eastern end of the public part of the Cove. There are no plans at this time to alter the ramp. Town Ordinances regulate the marine activities within the harbor to ensure the safety of persons and property, to promote availability and use of public resources and to create a fair and efficient framework for the administration of those resources.

There are 68 moorings in Perkins Cove. The maximum length of watercraft (because of safety) in the Cove is 42 feet, as determined in linear feet based upon a measurement from the rearmost part of the watercraft's transom to the most forward part of the bowstem, excluding the bowsprit and/or the pulpit. According to the Town Harbormaster there are 40 large boat moorings and 28 small boat moorings; thirty-six (36) of the large boat moorings are commercial and four (4) are non-commercial, eleven (11) of the small boat moorings are commercial and seventeen (17) are non-commercial. In 2022, the Town received \$27,545 in transient dock revenue. The Town ordinances stipulate the allocation of moorings.

All harbor activities are overseen by the Town Harbormaster, appointed by the Town Manager. He/she has jurisdiction over all watercraft in the Cove and enforces marine safety rules and regulations based upon the guidelines established by Town Ordinances, the U.S. Coast Guard, and other federal, state or locally recognized authorities. At this time there are no local or regional harbor management plans. There is a yearly evaluation process with the Ogunquit Harbor Committee to identify and plan for the upcoming year including mooring and docking fees, ordinance changes and maintenance of Perkins Cove. As part of the Town budgeting process, the Harbormaster does present a five-year plan for projects such as harbor dredging and repair/replacement of the Perkins Cove bright. Activities recommended by the Harbormaster include

- Revitalize commercial infrastructure including rebuilding the bridge, harbormaster house, and commercial bait house
- Rebuild the commercial pier to add efficient load/unload space for at least two vessels, where currently there is room for only one.
- Rebuild slipways and winch house and replace all deteriorating old foam style docks.

The land around Ogunquit's working harbor is zoned as Shoreland General Development 2, meaning the area is devoted to commercial and/or intensive recreational activity. Shoreland Zones, including the zone around Perkins Cove, are defined as being the land area within 250 feet of the normal high-water line. To protect the marine and water resources, the Shoreland Zone has more restrictive setbacks, lot coverage and density provisions that corresponding zones for residential and commercial uses located more than 250 feet from the high-water line.

Ogunquit has taken proactive steps to protect and manage its vital marine resources. The Town has several municipal committees charged with supporting protection of resources and assisting the community with maintenance, management, and sustainability. The Perkins Cove Harbor Committee, created in 2009, is responsible for making recommendations regarding certain improvements, regulations, conditions and actions for the betterment and enhancement of Perkins Cove, its Mooring Holders and general conditions of the Cove.

Dredging

Dredging is a key aspect of maintaining harbors and waterways in the region. In Ogunquit, Perkins Cove at the mouth of the Josias River, is the primary navigation channel and has a long history of improvement and maintenance dredging dating back to 1951. The area contains a public mooring field for 68 vessels, including commercial and charter vessels, as well as a public marina, which require periodic dredging. The depth required for safe passage within Josias River is -6.0 feet Mean Lower Low Water (MLLW), the primary sediment type within the channel is mud, and dredged materials have historically been barged for offshore disposal.

Perkins Cove in the Josias River is a designated federal navigation project, meaning the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has authority and responsibility over dredging the Cove. However, like many other federal navigation projects in the region that have been permitted and authorized, the frequency of Federal appropriation to support USACE dredging activities does not always align with the local dredging need.

On January 19, 2022, the Federal government announced that it allocated more than \$3.4 million for surveys and dredging of the Josias River at Perkins Cove by the USACE. It was secured through the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act signed into law in November 2021.

The preliminary projected start for the dredging of Perkins Cove (Josias River Federal Navigation Project) is 2024/2025. This project will entail a lengthy process of collecting and testing soil samples, identifying where dredge material is placed, conducting new hydrographic survey of the harbor, development of numerous elements for contract documents, a bidding process, and final award of the contract. As this is an Army Corps project, the Federal Environmental Impact Assessment alone can take up to a year to complete.

Scenic Vistas

Perkins Cove is home to the only remaining wooden, double-leaf draw footbridge in the United States. The pedestrian footbridge at the entrance to Perkins Cove is not only a stunning and beautiful symbol of Ogunquit, but a key connection that provides the only southerly access to the numerous small businesses, restaurants and shops located in and adjacent to the Cove.

The Federal Government approved \$2.85 million dollars for the revitalization of the Perkins Cove Pedestrian Footbridge in the 2022 Transportation and Housing Appropriations Bill. For years, the Town has actively evaluated and monitored the structure, making incremental repairs and remaining wary of potential safety hazards arising as the bridge and the piers that support it age. The federal funding will enable the Town to demolish and reconstruct the bridge, the harbormaster building and bait storage facility. Additional scenic vistas and cited in the Natural Resources chapter.



Photo 4 Perkins Cove Bridge