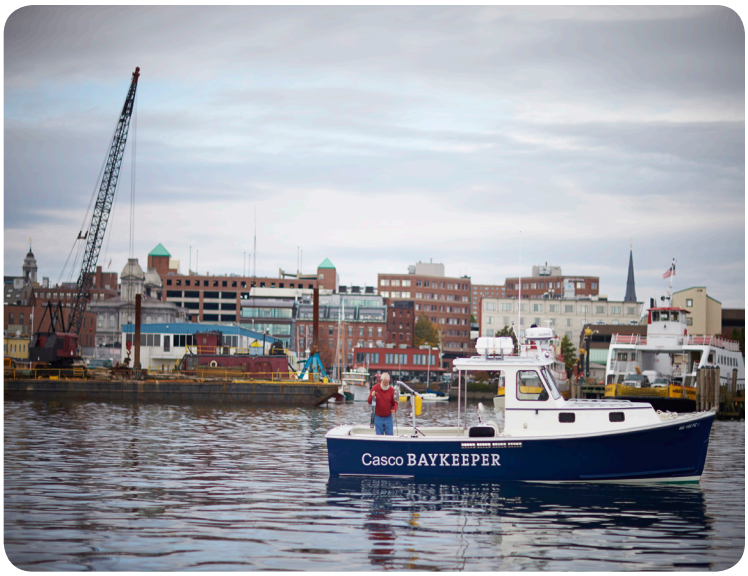
Digging into Dredging



A legacy of toxic sediments is clogging Portland's piers.
Photo by Dennis Welsh

The mud accumulating around the private piers and public wharves of Portland's waterfront is laced with "legacy contaminants" from long-departed factories and shipyards, as well as modern-day pollution from stormwater runoff. Now, at low tide, mud is exposed where vessels once were able to tie up along the working waterfront.

Wharf owners are faced with having to pay for testing, removing, and relocating contaminated sediments that they did not put there. Few disposal options exist, and most are prohibitively expensive, as well as environmentally destructive.

Casco Baykeeper Joe Payne was the first to suggest digging a hole in the Bay. In 2008, Joe said that a deep, rectangular hole beneath Casco Bay could be an economical and environmental way to deal with nearby contaminated dredge spoils. Technically, it is called a CAD cell, short for Confined Aquatic Disposal. At first, it might have seemed like a crazy idea, but like many ideas, the longer it percolated, the better it sounded to the waterfront community.

Bill Needelman, Portland's first Waterfront Coordinator, has recently established the Non-federal Dredge Committee to figure out what to do with polluted sediments around the privately-owned piers, as well as mud in anchorages in South Portland, at the Fish Pier, and along the Maine State Pier. Informally, the group is known as the "CAD Cell Committee."

Joe explains, "If we do nothing, these contaminated sediments can be disturbed by the prop wash from a large ship, a big storm, or construction. Tests have found that the mud in CAD cells stays where it is put."

"This is the beginning of a long-term process," Bill cautions. "We've engaged with the lobstering community to ensure that any site [we select] won't have an unreasonable impact on the industry." Bill notes that many lobstermen berth their boats at Portland piers. "We want it to be a benefit, not a burden."

Community Connection

Friends of Casco Bay Board Member Jeff Clements

Friends of Casco Bay was founded 25 years ago, after a report described Casco Bay as one of the most polluted bodies of water in the nation. People around the Bay knew it was time to act. In late 1989, Jeff Clements joined the founders of Friends of Casco Bay and filed the legal documents to incorporate Friends of Casco Bay as a not-for-profit organization. Jeff served on the first Board of Directors. In 2009, he was invited to return to the Board. His two decades of history with Friends of Casco Bay puts him in a unique and invaluable position to observe how the organization has changed over time.

Jeff's career has been marked by his work defending the public interest on environmental, financial, public health and other issues. In Maine, Jeff served as a policy planner in the State Planning Office. In Massachusetts, he served as the Chief of Public Protection and Advocacy Bureau in the Office of the Massachusetts Attorney General. In private practice, Jeff's brief in the *Citizens United v. FEC* case and the publication of his book, *Corporations Are Not People*, inspired a national, non-partisan campaign to challenge the creation of Constitutional rights for corporations, to enhance the voice of people in our democracy, and to overturn *Citizens United*.

Jeff recalls, "When we started Friends of Casco Bay, we recognized that a sense of responsibility and stewardship by everyone in the watershed offered the best, maybe the only, chance for the long-term health and beauty of Casco Bay. We wanted an organization that not merely pointed fingers, but created tools and methods, and built scientific credibility, to engage people to join in the ongoing work of protecting Casco Bay.

"I am gratified to see that we were right to bet that the people of the Casco Bay watershed would respond to our call for responsibility and stewardship."

There are now CAD cells in Boston Harbor (which has 11), as well as Rhode Island, California, and Hong Kong. This would be the first in Maine. *Environmental Protection*, a technical newsletter, says, "The use of CAD cells nationally for contaminated sediment disposal is increasing because they isolate contaminants from further impacting local marine food chains." Joe says, "Our priority is always going to be protecting the water quality of Casco Bay. This solution is a workable compromise for the environment and the economy."