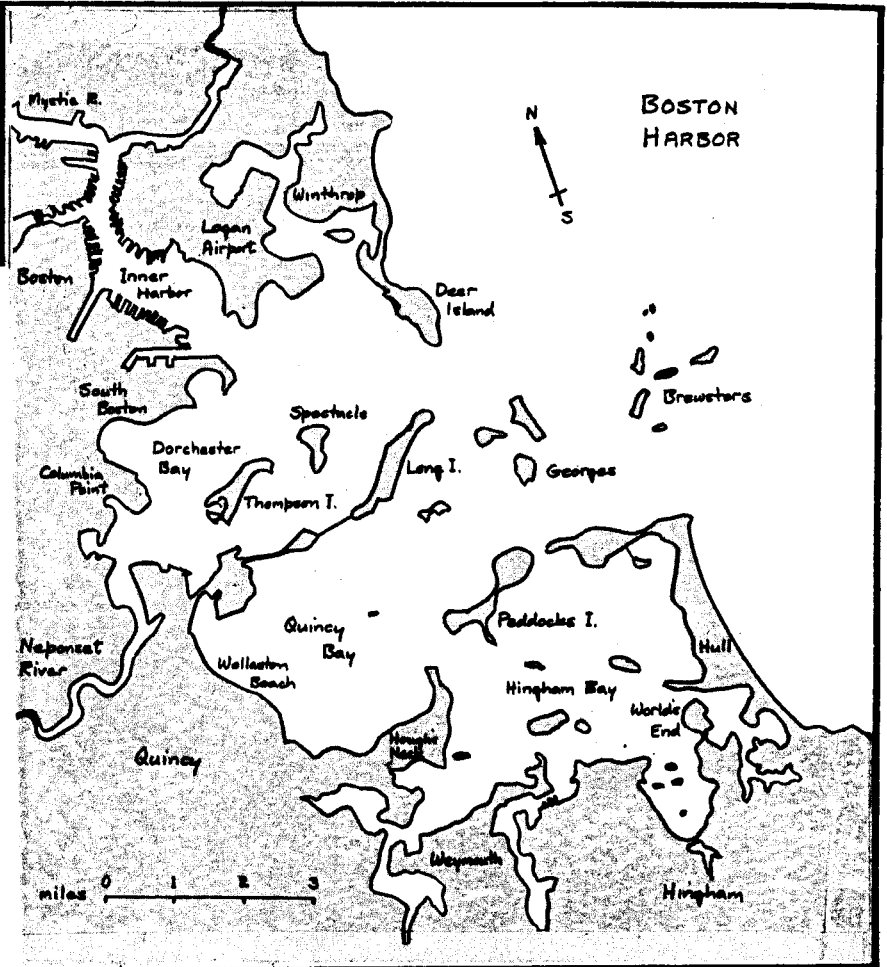




Facts about...

BOSTON HARBOR



BOSTON HARBOR YESTERDAY

Settlers were originally drawn to Boston by the large, sheltered harbor that existed there, the easily defended islands and peninsulas, and the rivers which brought Indian trade from the interior. Its islands provided pasture and its waters fish.

As Boston grew, parts of the Harbor, especially the tidal flats in the northern portions, were filled with rock obtained by leveling Boston's hills. Several of the islands were linked to the mainland by land fill or bridges. From the War of 1812 to present, many of the islands have served as sites for military forts and prisons. Few of the islands survive today free of structures or ruins.

BOSTON HARBOR TODAY

Fill has been so extensive that the Inner Harbor is today little more than a corridor to Boston's wharves, an open sewer through which the polluted waters of the Charles and Mystic Rivers and much of the City's wastes can reach the sea.

It is an understatement to say that metropolitan Boston has failed to make imaginative use of its unique resource. A Civil War vintage prison denies the public any access to Deer Island. A city hospital for the chronically ill and infirm on Long Island accomplishes the same. For years Spectacle Island was a city dump, and today the Boston Redevelopment Authority

(B.R.A.) moors barges of burning refuse from urban renewal off the Brewsters, the Harbor's most scenic islands. Logan Airport dominates the northern portion of the Harbor.

Elsewhere, highways built atop the waterline and houses built to the shoreline obstruct access. Oil tank farms, shopping center parking lots, warehouses, and other commercial uses are taking over more of the shorelines and marshes with a blatant disregard for the uniqueness of their locations.

Pollution is, of course, a major problem. Logan Airport fouls the air and creates noise. These add to the problems caused by the vast quantities of raw and treated sewage, and some industrial waste, which are discharged into the Harbor to be carried away by the tides. Sewage and oil spills cause the closing of several public beaches each summer.

Many of the Harbor's rich clam beds are closed to the public. Some are open only to commercial rakers who must clean and treat their take before marketing. Clamming is potentially a significant industry as well as a substantial recreational resource.

Boston Harbor is much more, however, than fill, airport noise, and water pollution. It is big—47 square miles of water, 180 miles of tidal shoreline, 30 islands with a total area of about 1400 acres. While the Inner Harbor is congested and dirty, the Outer Harbor has a lot of open water. There are islands with trees and

open meadows, some with rocky shores, many with mysterious ruins and old fortifications. World's End, a landscaped peninsula in Hingham is a gem. Those marshes that remain are a vital link in the ecological chain that supports marine life far from the limits of Boston Harbor's waters. They have a monetary value that planners frequently forget.

Despite very poor access, the Harbor's public beaches are used by about 1.5 million bathers during a summer season. There are 28 boat launching facilities and 35 yacht clubs with more than 3000 member families.

BOSTON HARBOR TOMORROW

The Harbor is large enough to accommodate a variety of uses, but conservation and recreation must compete with a number of incompatible alternatives. An example is the ever-recurring suggestion that Boston's second airport be anchored on the Brewsters, the remote and consequently unspoiled group of islands that graces the Harbor's mouth.

Considerable attention has been focused on Dorchester Bay as the proposed site for a housing project—world's fair in 1976. The Expo Boston '76 Corp., a private firm, has sought half a billion dollars of public funds, half federal, to create land at \$200,000 to \$1,000,000 per acre and a framework on which the Exposition and housing for 50,000 would be built. Such development presumes that the critical transportation problems that exist adjacent to the site will be solved by 1976 and presupposes completion of a controversial Inner Belt highway. Severe noise problems at the site (a plane immediately overhead every two minutes through the day by 1975) and a dearth of information on bed rock (-150 to -200 feet) and on tidal currents have done very little to dampen the enthusiasm with which the engineers promote their plans.

Although the Bicentennial Commission has made no decision yet, Expo '76 failed to sell its pie in the sky; it looks dead. The plan, however, has recently been reincarnated by the B.R.A., a public agency which spent considerable money in support of Boston Expo. As long as this threat remains alive, the City of Boston seems likely to oppose any rational Harbor-wide solution.

Meanwhile, despite "model" wetlands legislation, marshes are being filled. Many islands are privately owned and ripe for undesirable development. Bit by bit, haphazard development is preempting a resource which is uniquely capable of satisfying metropolitan Boston's critical need for water-based recreation and open space.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

Unless public awareness and use of the Harbor and islands is increased, the chance of protecting them from exploitation is nil.

A public authority with the power to plan and control development must be established. Presently four counties, sixteen municipalities,

and numerous agencies of the local, State, and Federal governments control various parts of the Harbor.

Islands, marshes, and shore areas must be acquired to be protected. Because Federal action would be slow, State action is necessary.

A good start toward a detailed plan has been made by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. The Harbor lends itself beautifully to recreational and open space development—beaches, boating, fishing, clamming, hiking, cycling, and camping. Deer and Long Islands, now linked to shore by roads, could be developed for the non-boating public. Peddocks and Thompson are still beautiful and should be linked to shore, and to other islands, only by excursion boat. Georges has a historical fort, and Little Brewster has Boston Light—each island a personality of its own. Given the rapidly growing demand for recreation and open space and the existence of alternative sites for housing, airports, and industrial development, plans which treat the Harbor with respect should fare well under careful economic evaluation of the alternatives.

WHAT IS BEING DONE?

To date there has been no coordinated movement to save Boston Harbor. The Eastern New England Group of the Sierra Club entered the fight in September, has informed itself, and has carried its point of view to a number of officials and planners. We have just begun.

No existing agency offers a clear choice to fill the role of regulator of Boston Harbor, and the political situation is complicated by a pending reorganization of State government. A bill, sponsored by Senator Moakley, to acquire the islands and place them in trust under the Department of Natural Resources almost passed last year and will be reintroduced. A second bill will deal with shore areas. Until it is known what other bills are filed, definite recommendations cannot be made.

Senator Kennedy has filed a study bill (S. 2840) to look into the feasibility and desirability of a Boston Harbor National Recreation Area.

Although the Boston Harbor issue is intimately tied up with all the urban-related problems—transportation, housing, pollution, and recreation—it deserves the active support of conservationists all over Massachusetts. Let your legislators know that you support State efforts to insure that Boston Harbor is developed to meet the need of the people for recreation and open spaces.

This Fact Sheet has been prepared by a task force chaired by Paul Swatek of the Eastern New England Group. Inquiries should be addressed to Box 32, West Somerville, Massachusetts 02144.