

Foreword: Message from the Superintendent of the National Parks of Boston

Michael Creasey*

National parks and other protected areas are core repositories of history—all histories—from the human cultures and the landscapes they shape, to the ecology and evolution of the still-not-fully-counted species, to the ever-changing rocks, soils, and waters upon which all of these elements find purchase. The role of park managers and their partners is to act as stewards of these special places, allowing the biota and landscapes to continue to evolve, while also inspiring today’s visitors and students to investigate and dialogue about these intersecting histories and their meanings in our lives today.

Investigations in parks are unavoidably complicated by intersecting human and so-called natural histories, especially in the case of parks that have urban–rural interfaces such as the Boston Harbor Islands National and State Park, where people have been part of evolving landscapes since the most recent glacier retreated, and the pace of change due to local—and now global—human activities has ever increased (Richburg and Patterson 2005). Studies of change in complex landscapes are adventures for investigators and may not ever fully unravel the exact causes and consequences of change amidst the human, physical, and non-human biotic factors.

The scientists and scholars whose work is reported here, as well as in *Northeastern Naturalist* Special Issue 3 (Roman et al. 2005), have stepped into this grand, unfolding mystery, and we at the National Parks of Boston are grateful. To steward the park’s biodiversity and natural processes, we must start with baseline information, and build onto that with studies of physical and biological change. These studies form the core “best available” science and scholarship that are required in decision-making processes. Resource management at the landscape-scale can only be achieved through partnerships that value information-sharing and collective impact, allowing for data to emerge and be interpreted so that managers can adapt their planning efforts (National Park Service 2006). Furthermore, these studies have also engaged dozens of local students and volunteers directly in the investigations, forever connecting each participant with these landscapes, and their findings continue to spark teaching and learning through park partners’ many education and youth engagement programs. We look forward to continuing these adventures and journeys into the unfolding future of the Boston Harbor Islands.

Literature Cited

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*National Parks of Boston, 21 Second Avenue, Charlestown, MA 02129;
michael_creasey@nps.gov.

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