

Conclusion

All maps tell a story. In the *Atlas*, the 23 GIS-derived maps depict Muscongus Bay as a firmly established yet moderately populated region, which actively utilizes the rich diversity of biological and physical resources. The *Atlas*' presentation of the bay, however, is just an introduction to the region.

More can be said and learned about this place by re-scaling, re-organizing, and querying the many different layers of digital data that were assembled to produce the maps in the *Atlas*. And these next chapters on the bay can now be told by others interested in creating their own maps.

Future maps might focus on smaller pieces of this region, showing the uses and environmental features of one estuary, peninsula, or town. Many of the GIS data layers presented in this document are sufficiently detailed to be shown at finer or more local geographic scales.

Original maps can be made by re-arranging the available data layers so that they provide new insights into relationships between various activities or elements. Mapmakers experienced in GIS can bring together data layers on new maps, whose unique "look and feel" may emphasize different relationships in the data. Using GIS, one could overlay contaminated water discharges (Map 10) with intertidal harvest restrictions (Map 6), or sea level rise predictions (Map 8) with working waterfronts facilities (Map 12). And again, these new images can be created at many different scales.

Entirely original data layers can also be developed and shown. For the *Atlas*, QLF and the Muscongus Bay Project Steering Committee worked with many people from the region to generate over 50 new data layers using information obtained from internet research, interviews, participatory sketch maps, existing paper maps, and other sources. Some of these layers were relatively simple to translate into a digital format while others required extensive communication and verification.

Of course, not every layer imaginable can be easily generated. QLF and Committee members were not able to create all the ones we had originally intended to include in the *Atlas*. In some cases the original data was not sufficiently reliable, such as a layer depicting development trends using recently released chronological information on electrical service connections. For others, the data proved too costly to obtain or generate, such as a layer depicting development patterns based on information from local tax maps. Yet these same data may be well within the budget or expertise of a group tasked with tracking coastal development in part or all of the Muscongus Bay region.

When creating the *Atlas*, the need to make historical information available for computerized mapping was also quite evident. Little digital data exists that can be used to geographically illustrate the story of this region's past. Not only are few features documented in a form suitable for GIS, but also there are almost no layers that show changes in use or environmental features over time.

Working with a GIS service center, new digital data can not only be developed for projects like these but also stored for either the sole use of the client or for the client to share with others. Some GIS service centers, like QLF's Center for Community GIS, also provide training to groups interested in generating original data using Global Positioning Systems (GPS), participatory mapping approaches like sketch mapping, or other forms of information research and documentation.

The *Atlas* shows just how effective GIS mapping can be in helping us to understand and appreciate the complexity of the places where we live. Based on accurate and well-scaled data, GIS-derived maps can also provide new perspectives on old issues, help resolve conflicts, inform management decisions, and assess the potential impacts of proposed resource uses.

For the Muscongus Bay region, this collection of maps gets us over the threshold and into new possibilities for using maps and digital data in local decision-making. It is a launching point from which we can begin to visualize and discuss our common issues and resources. QLF and the Muscongus Bay Project Steering Committee look forward to moving on from this point and working with the many local organizations, towns, businesses and other institutions interested in using GIS to sustain the environmental, economic and cultural vitality of our shared bay region.

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To order additional print copies of the *Muscongus Bay Atlas* contact either QLF office listed above.

The cost for each atlas is \$15 (add \$5 for tax, shipping, and handling). Rates are in U.S. dollars.

The entire *Muscongus Bay Atlas* as well as individual sections and images can be viewed and/or downloaded online.

Go to: www.qlf.org or www.community-gis.org and follow the links.

