

Whaleback Lighthouse Receives New Keepers

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The nonprofit American Lighthouse Foundation is the proud, new "keeper" of Maine's Whaleback Lighthouse, which stands sentinel on a wave-swept ledge at the entrance to the Piscataqua River, marking the approach to Portsmouth Harbor.

The U.S. Secretary of the Interior accepted the National Park Service's recommendation that the American Lighthouse Foundation (ALF) be awarded ownership of Whaleback Lighthouse through the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act in November 2008.

In a letter to ALF, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne noted, "I applaud the commitment of the American Lighthouse Foundation to the preservation of our nation's maritime heritage in accepting ownership of Whaleback Ledge Light."

The lighthouse was declared excess property in 2007 under the provisions of the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000 and made available to a suitable new steward. The American Lighthouse Foundation and its chapter, the Friends of Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouse (FPHL), subsequently submitted an application to the federal government to obtain ownership of the iconic 1872 beacon.

The United States Coast Guard will continue to maintain the light and fog signal at Whaleback Lighthouse, which is an active aid to navigation.

"Tackling the challenges that come with the stewardship of an offshore lighthouse will take time, dedication and teamwork," says FPHL chairman Ross Tracy. "As a chapter of the American Lighthouse Foundation, Friends of Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouse is committed to being a part of the passionate team that will ensure a bright future for Whaleback Lighthouse. Many thanks to the federal government for entrusting our organization with this priceless treasure."

Whaleback Lighthouse, which is readily visible from shore, is a rugged granite structure located in fast moving waters and subject to the fury of the sea during storms. It is not uncommon to see waves buffeting the lighthouse during powerful storms, which will sometimes exceed the height of the 50-foot tower, to the astonishment of many viewing the scene from land.

"For the thousands of people who visit the parks and forts on both the Maine and New Hampshire sides of the Piscataqua River, and for the fishermen and pleasure boaters who pass it every day, Whaleback Lighthouse is one of the most familiar and beloved icons of the region," says Jeremy D'Entremont, founder of the Friends of Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouse. "It stands as a memorial to the people who lived and worked on Whaleback Ledge for well over a century. Its past is rich with stories of great sacrifice by its keepers and their families."

D'Entremont goes on to say, "We look forward to working for the preservation of this historic structure. For the people in the local communities and beyond, if you care about Whaleback Lighthouse, we want to hear from you. If this effort is to succeed, we absolutely need your ideas, energy, and support."

The American Lighthouse Foundation, a national lighthouse preservation organization headquartered in Rockland, Maine, cares for 20 historic lights throughout New England, including Whaleback Lighthouse.

ALF's efforts at Whaleback will encompass the restoration and preservation of the historic tower, but will also include a community educational outreach program, and eventually some form of public access to the offshore lighthouse.

"The general public has a real sense of allure when it comes to Whaleback Lighthouse," says Bob Trapani, Jr., ALF executive director. "It's kind of like the lighthouse is almost close enough to 'touch' from land and yet traditionally it's been just out of reach offshore."

"That's all about to change now as our local chapter – Friends of Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouse – works with ALF on a day-to-day basis with the maintenance, preservation and educational facets of this unique project. Whaleback Lighthouse was automated in 1963, so you might say that after four decades, the 'keepers of the light' have returned and are ready to make some new and exciting history at the site."

To learn more about the American Lighthouse Foundation, visit www.lighthousefoundation.org

To become involved as a volunteer at Whaleback Lighthouse, visit www.portsmouthharborlighthouse.org



Maine's Whaleback Lighthouse was constructed in 1872 and stands 50-feet in height (Photo by Bob Trapani, Jr.)

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