

Merrymeeting News

The Newsletter of Friends of Merrymeeting Bay • P.O. Box 233 • Richmond Maine 04357

SPRING/SUMMER 1995

To Preserve, Protect and Improve the Natural Ecosystems of Merrymeeting Bay.

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay was formed in 1975 for people who care about the Bay's future. FOMB was revitalized in 1991 and re-incorporated as a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization. Our support comes from memberships, tax-deductible donations, and grants.

Education — Much of what we do is intended to increase our own awareness and knowledge of the important ecosystems that make up Merrymeeting Bay. We strive to learn more about the interrelationship we share with the Bay's flora and fauna, and about what impact our activities have on the Bay.

Research — We work to obtain basic data about the Bay, both for our own use and for use by others, to help us make well-informed decisions.

Property Protection — As a land trust serving the communities of Bath, Woolwich, Dresden, Richmond, Bowdoinham, Topsham and Brunswick, we provide information about conservation easements to area property owners, hold land in trust, and provide long-term stewardship.

NEW PROGRESS IN CONSERVATION & STEWARDSHIP

Criteria Being Developed for Accepting Easements

PROTECTING AND PRESERVING the ecosystems of Merrymeeting Bay is a big job and a complicated, long-term commitment. With Esther Lacognata of Topsham at the helm, our Conservation and Stewardship Committee has recently navigated a series of meetings that have helped us gain a thorough understanding of what kinds of conservation easements are possible and how they work, and how we can be most useful to area landowners who want to protect the Bay's fragile ecosystems. We have received invaluable assistance in this process from staff members of The Nature Conservancy and Maine Coast Heritage Trust.

In developing criteria for accepting easements, we have been guided by several major concerns — that protected lands benefit wildlife, that low-impact or traditional human use of the land be continued, and that the landowner has a sincere interest in long-term protection of the property. Furthermore, consideration of easements should be based on multiple values: to wildlife, to the landowner, and sometimes, where feasible, to the public. Key questions would be: Is the landowner interested in developing the legal means to protect the land in perpetuity? Has the property been identified in local comprehensive plans or by conservation groups as having important ecological attributes? Does the traditional, undeveloped use of the land (such as farming or woodcutting) benefit wildlife or have a low environmental impact? Is the property now used by the public for hiking, fishing, hunting, canoeing or scenic appreciation?

We will be continuing this process through the months ahead. Please get in touch with us if you would like to help, or if you know of — or have — property you believe should be protected by a conservation easement.

Coffin Wild Flower Preserve

WE ARE DELIGHTED TO ANNOUNCE that we have become local stewards of the Robert P. T. Coffin Preserve in Woolwich. The property is one of seven plant sanctuaries owned by the New England Wild Flower Society. Members of FOMB will regularly inspect the property, monitor its use by the public, and assure that trails are maintained and adequately marked. The 70-acre property is located along both sides of Rte. 128, has about 1,000 ft. of wooded frontage on Merrymeeting Bay and a beautiful marsh. The Wild Flower Society's principal area of interest is in the preservation of endangered plant species and the protection of habitats that have a high diversity of native plants. For more information, please write to us or call.

A MEMORABLE SUMMER WEEKEND ON SWAN ISLAND

ABOUT 70 MEMBERS AND FRIENDS of Merrymeeting Bay enjoyed a beautiful day in mid-August — picnicking, hiking, touring, looking at eagles — on Swan Island, the 1,700-acre state-owned wildlife preserve in the Kennebec River near Richmond. The weather was Maine perfect — dry, clear, warm — and there were no mosquitoes (okay, we sighted two). About 30 of the visitors (11 families) pitched their tents or stayed in the Adirondack shelters and made a weekend of it. There were potluck meals, singing by the campfire (led by Sean Donovan) and a sunrise tour of the island, and even a pancake breakfast courtesy of Peg Parsons. Those who brought canoes or kayaks paddled around Little Swan Island and were treated to the sight of

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BIBLIOGRAPHY ON WATER QUALITY & NATURAL RESOURCES

Through the industry of our Water Quality Chairman Ed Benedikt, we have compiled a good, introductory bibliography about the Bay.

The bibliography, while not yet as scientifically exhaustive as we would like, is a solid resource for those who want to gain a quick overview of the Bay and know what information is available.

This resource would be very useful to teachers who want to incorporate Merrymeeting Bay into their study-units about ecology, general science, rivers, wildlife or water pollution.

For more information, please write to us or call Tim Nason, 737-4182.



Pickerel Frog

1995 FOMB ANNUAL MEETING

OUR ANNUAL Meeting on April 25 at Bridge Academy in Dresden was another delicious potluck supper, something of a specialty with us, followed by a wonderful armchair tour of Merrymeeting Bay via Joe Trafton's camera. Joe has taken slides of the complete shoreline of the Bay and its approaches — all the way from the Carlton Bridge in Bath, up past Thorne's Head, through the Chops, into the Eastern River, up

around Swan Island, back down around Abbagadasset Point and into the Abby, out again and into the Cathance, into the Muddy, and finally along the island-studded Androscoggin and back through the Chops again. Joe explained that he had put together this visual tour of the Bay to compensate for being unable to take everyone in his boat, something he is frequently called upon to do. The tour inspired a lively session of questions and stories about the Bay.

Joe had previously presented his tour to 1st and 2nd graders in Topsham. He said he had first laid down the outline of a boat on the floor of the classroom using a long piece of rope and had the kids sit in it to watch the slides. Afterwards the kids were asked what parts of the tour they found particularly noticeable. Joe said their responses were inter-

MEMORABLE WEEKEND ON SWAN ISLAND

Continued from page 1

wild rice growing on the mudflats and cardinal flowers growing in long drifts along the rocky shore. Many deer were seen grazing in the fields, as were a few snapping turtles along the gravel road and wild turkeys in the woods.

Out on the island we hardly had time (or inclination) to talk about all the important conservation work we need to do. We mostly enjoyed the scenery, the sense of calm, the quiet talk of families

and friends. It was nice to know such a place exists.

Many, many thanks are due to our volunteer helpers, and to Shop 'n' Save Supermarket in Brunswick, which donated a \$50 gift certificate toward picnic expenses.

There will very likely be a 3rd Annual Swan Island Summer Picnic, so mark your calendar. In the meantime, anyone may make a reservation to visit or camp on the island May through Labor Day. Write to Swan Island Reservations, Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, RFD #1, Box 6378, Waterville, ME 04901 — or call 547-4167. □



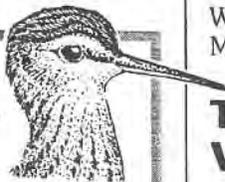
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and donors — is in the long-term quality of our work, in developing conservation easements, education programs and support for research, all toward the protection of Merrymeeting Bay.

By the way, would anyone like to help us recruit **more** volunteers? □

Lesser Yellowlegs

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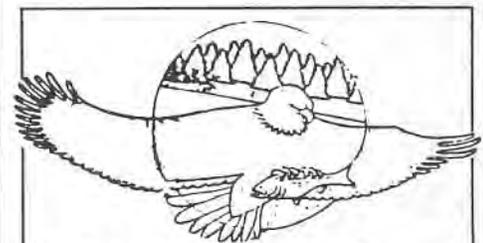
is the newsletter of Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, P.O. Box 233, Richmond, Maine 04357, and is published seasonally.

Merrymeeting News is sent to all FOMB members (\$10 annually), and to other friends of the Bay. For information call Tim Nason, Black Spruce Graphics, Dresden (737-4282). FOMB welcomes donations to help pay for the cost of printing and postage.

THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS!

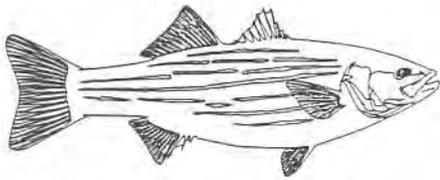
So many members and friends have helped us this year — by coming to meetings, serving on committees, preparing food for special events, helping with the Bike-a-Thon and the Summer Picnic, helping at our information booth, sending out membership cards, clipping newspaper articles, and so much more.

We would like to acknowledge everyone who has lent a helping hand. Please know that your efforts on our behalf are appreciated more than we can say. Indeed, the greatest thanks we can give our volunteers — and to our members



FOMB T-SHIRTS

OUR COLORFUL T-SHIRTS are still available at \$15. Please send checks and a donation of \$2 to cover postage to P.O. Box 233, Richmond, ME 04357. The T-shirts are bright teal-blue Hanes Beefy-Ts, with a multi-color image on the front of an eagle in flight clutching a fish in its talons. On the back is printed "Friends of Merrymeeting Bay" in white script. Shirts are available in large, x-large and xx-large (medium is sold out).



Striped Bass

esting and perceptive.

Before the business portion of the evening, introductions were made during which Max Ward and Linwood Rideout led a hilarious exchange about the spelling of "Abbagadassett." Max said to "put in two of everything."

Tim Nason then gave an annual report reviewing the year and asking members to help FOMB "follow through" on its commitments to the Bay. Jean Parker was highlighted as one who sets the standard for "following through." Joe Trafton led the group through nominations and elections.

The following were elected to the Steering Committee for one-year terms: Ed Benedikt of Brunswick, Ed Friedman of Bowdoinham, Bill Hoffman of Dresden (*Secretary*), Tad Hunter of Topsham, Bill Jewell of Woolwich, Esther Lacognata of Topsham (*Vice Chairman*), Tim Nason of Dresden (*Chairman*), Jean Parker of Woolwich, Vance Stephenson of Brunswick (*Treasurer*), and Joe Trafton of Topsham.

2ND ANNUAL MERRYMEETING BAY BIKE-A-THON

THE 1995 Merrymeeting Bay Family Bike-a-Thon was held on May 27 at the Richmond Sauna in Richmond Corners. 16 riders made pledges of \$25 or more, qualifying them for prizes. Total donations amounted to \$450. In addition, several Friends of the Bay just wanted to ride around the Bay, join FOMB, renew their membership, or buy the bright yellow "heron on a bicycle" T-shirt.

About half the riders took the 50-mile route all the way around the Bay (several riders claimed it was more than 50 miles). The rest (except for two hardy souls who took the mountain bike trail to the Bay and back via woods roads) chose the 25-mile route that crossed the Bay via Joe Trafton's boat at Abbagadassett Point. Many riders complimented us on the routes and mentioned the real physical challenge they present, and stressed that the trip was well worthwhile. Several riders offered to help with publicity for next year's bike-a-thon.

Attendance may have been low due to rainfall in many parts of Maine that day, even though it was a beautifully clear, cool morning in Richmond when we decided to press ahead. Sometime around 1 p.m., however, just when cyclists were coming into the long uphill

home stretch through Bowdoinham and Richmond, the skies really unloaded with a solid, cold downpour. Shivering cyclists were given shelter on Richard Jarvi's front porch and shared a tasty meal provided by our volunteers. It was heartening indeed to see the smiles and hear such animated discussion from the rather waterlogged group.

Vance Stephenson of Brunswick raised donations of \$220 for FOMB, thereby winning him a very nice mountain bike courtesy of Bath Cycle & Ski. What was Vance's fundraising secret? \$1 of each donation he received went toward a raffle for the mountain bike. So, after receiving accolades for his hefty donation to FOMB, Vance generously passed his newly won bike to Deb Thistle, who had won the raffle. Vance also led the pack in the number of donors he chalked up: 18.

Second prize winner, with 14 donations totalling \$47, was Ron Weeks of Gardiner. His prize was a gift certificate from Center St. Bicycles of Brunswick.

Third prize winner, and possibly happiest recipient, was David Stephenson of Bowdoinham (no relation to Vance). His donations totalling \$43 won free saunas at Richmond Sauna for himself and all his cycling buddies.

Thanks so much to our dedicated and generous pledge riders! Thanks also to Bath Cycle & Ski, Center Street Bicycles, and Richmond Sauna Bed & Breakfast for their support. □

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, P.O. Box 233, Richmond, Maine 04357

ANNUAL DUES \$10.00 (tax deductible). Renewal Gift

I enclose \$ _____ to cover membership for _____ year(s).

I also enclose \$15 \$25 \$50 \$100 \$500

Other \$ _____ as a tax-deductible donation.

NAME _____

RR#/STREET ADDRESS _____

TOWN / STATE / ZIP _____

PHONE _____

SEASONAL ADDRESS _____

I would like —

- A copy of **Conservation Options: A Guide for Maine Landowners**. A check for \$5.00 is enclosed.
- A copy of **Preserving Family Lands: Essential Tax Strategies for the Landowner**. A check for \$5.00 is enclosed.
- An **FOMB T-Shirt** (lg. x-lg. xx-lg) A check for \$15.00 is enclosed.

Note: Write checks payable to FOMB. An additional donation of at least \$2.00 per order is requested to cover the cost of postage and a padded envelope.

LOOKING AHEAD: LECTURES & FIELD TRIPS

THROUGH THE WINTER and spring of 1996, we plan to hold several public talks about the Bay — along with a modest series of outdoor field trips. Topics being considered are the history of Swan Island, rare plants of the Kennebec estuary, fish and wildlife of Merrymeeting Bay, birdwatching, historical matters, archaeology, the dioxin threat, farming and much more. Canoe or kayak trips are being considered for the Eastern River and the Cathance, as is a spring "mudwalk" to look for rare plants. Ideas and volunteers are welcomed! Call us at 737-4282 for more information. □

ISLAND PURCHASED FOR CONSERVATION

LEE'S ISLAND, in the Kennebec River near Phippsburg Center, was purchased this summer by the Maine

Dept. of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife. The 117-acre island is a nesting site for bald eagles. □

STRIPERS RETURN TO THE KENNEBEC

THE NEWS WAS STUNNING and memorable: striped bass returned to the Kennebec River in unprecedented numbers this spring — considering their complete extirpation from the river during the 1970s.

The sudden rebound occurred all along the Atlantic seaboard, and immediately prompted calls for higher harvesting quotas from commercial fishing interests which have been hurt by the drastic decline of cod and haddock. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) let some states more than quadruple their commercial harvest of stripers. This action prompted recreational fishermen to argue that the expansion would restrict sport fishing, and conservationists to warn that the species could collapse again if adequate

protections are not kept in place.

Three quarters of the striped bass population spawns in Chesapeake Bay. The resurgence of the species in Maine, which is at the northern limit of the stripers' range, would largely benefit a local sport fishery. So far, tight regulations are being maintained here. Catch-and-release is still the rule, and the minimum length has been kept at 36". Massachusetts reduced its minimum length to 34", New Hampshire is at 32", while Rhode Island stands at 28". Southern states allow 18" fish to be taken.

The ASMFC's management plan now allows 75% of legal-size fish to pass unharvested. Populations will be monitored as to their mortality rate, number of yearlings, and the quantity of spawning stock.

The New England Coastal Conservation Assn. wants states to take a strong stand against liberalized commercial regulations, arguing that sport fishing contributes more to state economies than commercial fishermen. The Commission has responded that sociological implications and traditions need to be considered too. □



**FRIENDS of
MERRYMEETING BAY**

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