

Nonprofit using photos to examine changes to Merrymeeting Bay area

A LOOK AT THE LAND

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THE FRIENDS OF MERRYMEETING BAY will update an ongoing study of the environment and farmland around the bay this summer. The Cathance River is one of six rivers the group is involved in study and advocacy. CHRIS QUATTRUCCI / THE TIMES RECORD

BOWDOINHAM

To help preserve and protect the largest freshwater estuary north of Chesapeake Bay, Friends of Merrymeeting Bay is taking a bird's-eye view. The nonprofit will use aerial photos to analyze how land and its use is changing around the bay.

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay previously worked with James W. Sewall Company of Old Town to provide photography, mapping and analysis in 2008; previous aerial photos of the bay dating back to 1956 are included in the research.

“It will be a 10-year review of aquatic vegetation and land use changes in the bay,” said Friends Chairman Ed Friedman.

The organization specifically looks at the land about a half mile around the bay.

“There’s really no other way or place where anyone is keeping track of this,” said Friedman. “You can see the change over time. Short of going into a town office and looking at building permits, but this shows the physical change.”

Friedman expects the flights and study to be underway by early August; the results are expected sometime in the fall.



THE FRIENDS OF MERRYMEETING BAY hosted a July 7 bird walk to kick off their Summer Outside events. In addition to research, the group provides outdoor events for the community throughout the summer. COURTESY OF ED FRIEDMAN, FRIENDS OF MERRYMEETING BAY

“We try to fly at the time of maximum vegetation in the bay and it has to be at low tide,” he said.

The final report will give insight into how more development has the potential to impact the health of the rivers. By looking at how vegetation has changed over time, the group can assess environmental changes, he said, noting that increased sediment and a changing habitat can impact water quality and wildlife.

In addition to vegetation and new structures, possible changes in farmland will be analyzed.

“There’s been resurgence in the area of farming, especially with young farmers and organic farming,” said Friedman. “But, they are using land that has been in agriculture for generations.”

Farming stats

An estimated 527,000 acres of farmland and \$1 billion in land and infrastructure belongs to farmers 55 and older statewide, according to a 2016 study by Land for Good, a nonprofit that assists farmers in land transfers. With the potential for that land to change hands, Friends of Merrymeeting Bay will provide a more regionalized look at how farmland use has changed.

Funding for the \$50,000- \$60,000 land use study — such as the Friends’ other projects — comes from the group’s membership of about 450 households and from grants.

Information gathered from the study will be shared with local residents and communities for use in planning and development.

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay will incorporate the new information in their education efforts. The group is running a series of events for the public, the next of which will be a Muddy River Paddle on July 17. For a full schedule or to pre-register for an event, visit friendsofmerrymeetingbay.org.

“It’s a busy time of year for us,” said Friedman.