Merrymeeting News

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The Newsletter of Friends of Merrymeeting Bay • PO Box 233 • Richmond Maine 04357 • 207-666-1118 • www.fomb.org

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay (FOMB) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Our mission is to preserve, protect, and improve the unique ecosystems of the Bay through:

Education

Conservation & Stewardship

Research & Advocacy

Member Events

Support comes from members' tax-deductible donations and gifts.

Merrymeeting News is published seasonally and is sent to FOMB members and other friends of the Bay. Article hyperlinks and color images are available in our online edition at www.fomb.org

For more information, contact:

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Chair
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Free the Andro Coalition

In the face of Brunswick-Topsham dam relicensing, the Free the Andro Coalition is creating an additional voice for migratory fish historically using the Androscoggin River to access spawning grounds.

The need for the Coalition stems from deeply adverse impacts of man-made dams to successful passage of migratory fish to and from the Gulf of Maine. The Coalition's focus is to create unfettered native fish passage at the first dam (the Brunswick dam), blocking access to the rest of the river.

This dam's ability to pass fish is critical to the future viability of migratory fish populations in the river. The dam, with its active hydro-power facility currently owned by the Canadian multi-national Brookfield, is well documented as a significant obstacle to both upstream and downstream passage.

All hydroelectric dams are licensed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and their licenses run for 30 to 50 years. The Brunswick-Topsham license expires in 2029, creating a once in a lifetime opportunity during the relicensing process to dramatically improve fish passage and restoration on the lower Androscoggin River. The Coalition will advocate for and support solutions ranging from dam removal to properly vetted dam redesigns supported by solid data from objective research and that meet or surpass best practices for creating unfettered fish passage.

Coalition founding members are: Merrymeeting Bay Trout Unlimited (Chapter 329), Maine Rivers, American Rivers, Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, and RESTORE: The North Woods. We recognize the need for a strong and credible voice and welcome additional members from organizations that share our goals and can help support our cause.

For more information on Brunswick-Topsham dam relicensing:

- See the second item down on the FOMB Cybrary Legal web page: http://cybrary.fomb.org/legal.cfm
- Allowing Fish Back in the Andro 15 minute video: FOMB Video web page or https://youtu.be/17TNa1126cE
- Free the Andro Coalition on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/people/Free-the-Andro/61585184032616/
- Bowdoin College's Brunswick Dam Fish Passage website: https://courses.bowdoin.edu/brunswick-dam-fish-passage/news/save-the-andro-coalition-launched/
- Free the Andro website (coming soon): https://freetheandro.org/

Chip Spies

From the Chair

It has been a busy and certainly at national and international levels a trying year. As environmental safeguards years in the making have dropped away like dead flies on a winter window sill, the work we do at local levels becomes all the more important. FOMB has continued our educational work with kids and adults around the Bay, we have a couple of major land protection efforts in process or just completed in early 2026, and our often cutting-edge research work continues to inform our advocacy efforts, most recently focused on Androscoggin water quality and the federal relicensing of Lewiston Falls and Brunswick-Topsham dams.

This newsletter is chock full and there is some great material we had no room for, so my usual year-end comment is short. Thank you so much to our very dedicated board members, volunteers, and membership. Our accomplishments are yours. The work we do is part of a long game, and I leave you with these applicable words from Susan Freinkel on page 200 in her wonderful book, *American Chestnut: The Life, Death, and Rebirth of a Perfect Tree* (winner of the National Outdoor Book Award-Natural History Literature Category), as she writes about the patience and undying optimism of many chestnut scientists and restoration practitioners:

"Still, it's in the challenging ground of daily practice that a seed of faith blossoms and grows---from the isolated efforts of a handful of scientists to a movement several thousand strong; from devotion to a single species to a broader dedication to the natural world; from belief that it is possible to right one human-inflicted ecological wrong to the conviction that future wrongs must be prevented. In the case of the chestnut, faith in a seed has summoned a grace that is far-reaching."

Respectfully submitted,
Ed Friedman, Chair

Assessing PFAS Exposure in Common Eiders and Bald Eagles in Northern Casco Bay

Following the 2024 PFAS Spill at the Former Brunswick Naval Air Station
Preliminary Project Update February 10, 2026

Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI) has been conducting research on Maine wildlife for several decades. A particular focus has involved sampling top avian predators to provide insights on contaminant exposure patterns in aquatic ecosystems. In August 2024, an accidental discharge of PFAS-based fire-fighting foam occurred at the former Brunswick Naval Air Station (BNAS), and it was confirmed to flow into Casco Bay via Harpswell Cove.

While state agencies immediately responded by evaluating the presence of toxic PFAS chemicals in water, fish, and shellfish, no work was being conducted to evaluate exposure and impacts on higher level wildlife species in the Casco Bay ecosystem. Due to past sampling work, BRI was uniquely positioned to evaluate the potential impacts of this spill on two iconic bird species in Casco Bay: common eiders and bald eagles. With funding from the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW), BRI and MDIFW collected samples from common eiders and bald eagles throughout Casco Bay and from reference sites in Muscongus Bay. They sampled bald eagles more broadly throughout Casco Bay, Merrymeeting Bay (with significant help from FOMB), and elsewhere, to evaluate whether evidence suggested these birds were exposed to PFAS from the spill.

Analyses are still being conducted, but very preliminary findings demonstrate that PFAS are biomagnifying up the food web to both species via their aquatic diets, demonstrating the value of these species in monitoring environmental contaminants in aquatic systems. Further efforts are underway to assess whether PFAS concentrations are greater in areas associated with the spill and to assess the potential for impacts on either species.

Chris DeSorbo, Micah Miller and Christine Gardiner, BRI

FOMB 2025 Accomplishments and Partners

Volunteers

Approximately 2,000 volunteer hours (250 days)
100 volunteers

Membership

450 households

4 newsletters

Grants

$5,000 (education)

$7,500 (general operating)

Bequests and Memorial Donations

$100,762

Media

Over 40 print, TV, and internet insertions (PFAS, Speaker Series, GE salmon, water monitoring, Bay Day, etc.)

Education

Zoom Speaker Series (415 registrants)

Speaker Series broadcasts on community cable TV stations

Two Bay Days

Website updates and development

Main St. Bath winter critter display

Bath Savings Institution critter display

Conservation and Stewardship

Additional easement work

Negotiation of land purchases

Continuous landowner outreach

Ongoing waste management monitoring

Mowing Pork Pt. field

Research

Water quality monitoring (usual 17 sites)

Water quality monitoring (additional 10 Androscoggin sites)

Shad counting at Brunswick Dam

PFAS sampling on Androscoggin, Kennebec, BNAS

Advocacy (legal, postings, letters, testimony, etc.)

EMF health effects

Work on extending Androscoggin upgrade upriver

Healthy Rivers/Healthy Gulf promoting safe fish passage

Various national efforts (NEPA, ocean plastics, ESA, climate, etc.)

PFAS monitoring/detection at BNAS, Androscoggin discharges

PFAS monitoring on Androscoggin and Kennebec for Bigelow/FOCB Estuary Project

Brunswick Dam relicensing, FERC proceeding comments

Primary Partners

The Archaeological Conservancy

Maine Coalition to Stop Smart Meters

Maine Historic Preservation Commission

Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Department of Marine Resources

Bowdoinham Public Library

Maine Land Trust Network

Brunswick Sewer District

Main St. Bath

Country Farm Furniture

Friends of Sebago Lake

Department of Environmental Protection

Downeast Salmon Federation

Native Fish Coalition

Piti Theatre

Chop Pt. School

Biodiversity Research Institute

Point of View Helicopter Services

Native Plant Trust

Endangered Species Coalition

Center for Food Safety

N. American Versatile Hunting Dog Assoc.

Brunswick Citizens for a Safe Environment

Bath Savings Institution

New England Foundation for the Arts

Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences

Maine Master Naturalist Program

Merrymeeting Bay Chapter Trout Unlimited

Aquaterra Films

The Ghost Canoe

It began like any other beach seining sampling round in the upper Kennebec River. We launched in Waterville and were doing the sites in reverse order for a change of scenery. This was early on in the sampling cycle, so river flows were 4,000 cubic feet per second, near perfect conditions for beach seining. The weather was perfect too, brilliant sunshine and warm. It was going to be a good day. The first order of business was to run down the river to Augusta and then seine our way back upriver. It would be a long day but a good one. With all our gear loaded, we set off.

The ride down river was glorious. All the usual river denizens were out plying their trades. Bald eagles, osprey, great blue herons, and cormorants abounded. There were enough river herring still swimming up to spawn and running back to the ocean to feed the many hungry mouths that waited. We witnessed several sturgeons jumping and the eagles pestering the successful ospreys, flying like mad with their hard-won suppers.

For those who have not witnessed this behavior, it is exciting. Eagles have learned either through training or through the long mystery of genetic behavior that it is often easier to steal your supper than to catch it yourself. An osprey hovers momentarily and stoops before crashing into the water. As it descends, its wings fold back not in the stowed position but in mid high flap. The bird's long black talon-tipped feet swing forward with its head tucked slightly back. The eagles have learned to watch the osprey.

As soon as the successful osprey departs the water flapping frantically it aligns its catch carefully in its talons. The fish faces forward lessening drag for flight. And flight it will be. The eagle knows if it can outpace its ancient rival in flight the osprey will drop its fish and the eagle will snatch it, often in midair. The race is on.

"This is when we saw it: A canoe, half swamped. No one was on board. We pulled up next to it and began investigating."

The osprey claws for elevation but it's hard to climb with the extra weight. The osprey pours on the steam rapidly accelerating, but the eagle started from atop a massive pine. The eagle has the advantage of elevation, rapidly accelerating and overtaking the osprey. The jig is up, and the osprey releases its catch swerving away as the eagle steals its lunch. The osprey immediately returns to hunting mode. Perhaps with the eagle occupied, the osprey can get away successfully the next time.

We completed the first four of eight beach seining sites on our way back upriver. Site four once again delights with a multitude of species and has the three we are actively seeking—juvenile American shad, alewives, and blueback herring. This seining site usually takes the longest. It is not uncommon to catch several hundred fish here and sometimes as many as ten species. By the time we complete the site, the sun is well past its zenith. Three sites to go as we ascend Six-Mile falls in the jet boat.

I love this spot. It is the most technical driving we do. Entrance to the falls is a hard left at speed over a boulder field. The line is tight here, and being out of the lane so much as a boat-width could be trouble. The hard left is followed by an even harder right, allowing the stern of the boat to wash out left. Once the stern settles, you go back to full throttle on plane and exit through the top of the falls, bearing left past large glacial erratics trapped on a ledge above the falls. The whole transition lasts 16 seconds—a very exciting 16 seconds. But things were about to get a lot more exciting. At the next site, we seined and there wasn't much happening. A few juvenile smallmouth bass, and that was it. We reloaded the net and took off upstream.

This is when we saw it: A canoe, half swamped. No one was on board. We pulled up next to it and began investigating. It was a Grumman aluminum canoe, 17 feet long. No paddle was evident, and the canoe was full of gear. We towed it to shore while one of us kept watch on the river. We were not happy to see a life jacket floating in the bottom of the canoe and immediately got on the phone to Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to tell them what we had found.

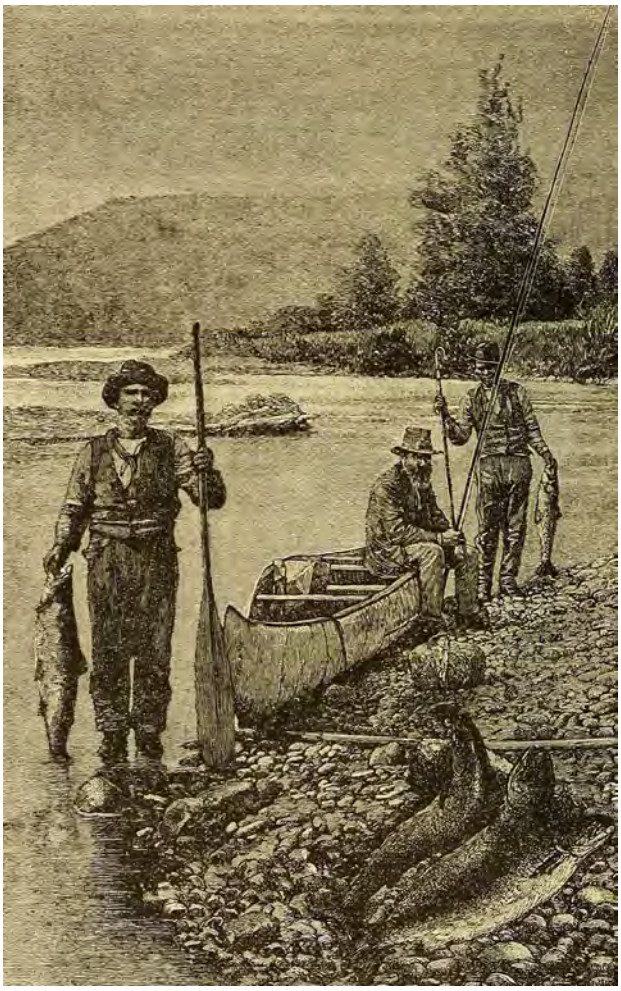
I began searching the canoe contents. A full suite of fishing gear—rods, tackle box, lures. Camping gear including sleeping bag, tent, and a backpack, along with a cooler with light provisions, perhaps an overnight's worth. I continued to bail through the gear looking for some form of ID. Nothing.

We all continued to scan the river. We did some yelling hoping for a response. We abandoned the beached canoe and ran upriver in the boat, looking in the water and at the shore. We jetted all the way back up to the boat launch and

Continued on next page

Ghost Canoe, continued from page 4

nothing. One of the crew got off at the boat launch to take the boat trailer down to the Sidney boat launch, as it would be easier to ferry the canoe downstream vs. upstream. We repeated the process, running back down to the canoe. Again nothing. I feared the worst. We called Inland Fisheries and Wildlife again, and they assured us that the wardens had been informed.



Life jackets? We don't need any when salmon fishing on the Kennebec!
Image: Wikimedia Commons

We took one last opportunity to go through the gear in the canoe before we towed it down to Sidney. I grabbed the tackle box and discovered something in the bottom I hadn't noticed before—a zip-lock bag full of photographs. I pulled them out and went through them one by one. Family photos going back many years. The kids when they were babies, toddlers, and teens. A wife, I assume, and family pets. There were over a hundred photos. I thought it strange to bring those on a fishing and camping canoe expedition, but at least we had some photos to work with to potentially identify the owner of the canoe.

We put all the soaked gear in the jet boat and set up the tow for the canoe. At Six-Mile Falls we lined the canoe down the falls and then drove the jet boat down. The trip to the Sidney boat launch was uneventful. The crew was silent.

There were no wardens waiting for us there. We called again, and they said we would be contacted. Unwilling to leave the canoe and gear behind, we loaded it all in the bed of the truck and put the canoe on top of the boat and tied it down. We headed back to the office and made plans for the next days' seining. We put all the gear from the canoe in the work garage. Still no contact from the warden service.

The next morning, I went into the garage and looked at the soaking pile of gear on the floor. I grabbed the backpack and dumped its contents on the floor. Underwear, pants, socks, and a t-shirt. I opened all the pack's pockets—toothbrush, flashlight, headlamp, toothpaste, bar of soap, and some aspirin. Nothing. No ID.

On a lark, I grabbed the soaked jeans on the floor and went through the pockets and to my surprise felt a wad of soaked paper. I carefully removed it and found a soggy envelope. A bill! With a name and address! In full sleuth mode now, I ran into the office and looked up the address. Right in town. I checked the state email system, and sure enough this person worked for the state. The email system includes phone numbers. I'll bet you can guess what I did next!

The phone rang three times and a man answered. I asked if this was so and so, and he answered yes. I asked him if he had been canoeing on the Kennebec River recently. There was a long pause at his end, and I explained what we had found. The man reluctantly explained that he'd rolled the canoe shortly after departing the Waterville boat launch and swam back to shore. He watched helplessly as his canoe drifted off downstream minus its pilot. He was not wearing a life jacket and felt fortunate to have survived the incident.

I told the fella I had his canoe and all his gear at the office. He thanked me and said he'd be over to recover it. In short order he arrived, and we loaded all his gear into his vehicle and tied the canoe to the rack on top. He was very quiet. Subdued even. I told him I was glad he was OK and relieved he'd survived the accident. Without saying a word, he got in his car and left. It was some time before I came to grips with his reaction. I think he was still in shock.

I went into my office, satisfied that the story had ended well. The phone rang and it was Sergeant so and so from the warden service…

Nate Gray

FOMB Preliminary 2025 Financial Statement

Even though we have yet to close the books on last year, enough information has been received and organized to offer a reasonable first glance at FOMB financial activity during 2025.

Another busy year concluded with some serious fundraising which almost made us look like a "for" profit enterprise. Despite the healthy profit reported for last year, a chunk was dedicated to exercising a right-of-first-refusal option to acquire the "Bald Head" property on Centers Pt. in Bowdoinham on which we have held a conservation easement since 2000. We exercised the option in December and subsequently paid $160,000 for the parcel in January, 2026.

When 2025 concluded (i.e., before the land acquisition), total unrestricted liquid assets were approximately $765,000 with an additional $54,000 in restricted stewardship funds. Even after the purchase of the Bald Head parcel, it is clear that FOMB remains fiscally viable.

Respectfully submitted,
Vance Stephenson, Treasure

2025 Income $296,800		**2025 Expenses $35,900**	
Bequest/Memorial Donations	36%	Programs	72%
Annual Appeal	16%	Administration[2]	23%
Bald Head	16%	Membership & Fundraising	5%
Membership	11%		
Grants	4%		
Other[1]	17%		

1. Primarily investment income from CDs and mutual funds
2. Although the percentage may seem high, it is largely driven by lower total costs versus fixed administrative costs: office rent + insurances represent 17% of the 23%. The 2025 expense was 34% lower than the average annual expense across the last 10 years ($54,100).

Cash income less cash expense for 2025: $260,900

Androscoggin Improvement Efforts Continue

Where we left off with the fall newsletter, the Board of Environmental Protection (BEP) was going to hold a deliberative session shortly to consider various reclassification upgrade proposals, including for the upper lower Androscoggin River from Worumbo dam in Lisbon Falls to Gulf Island Pond dam in Auburn. This section of river easily meets Class B standards, a significant improvement over the current Class C, largely in permitted minimum levels of dissolved oxygen (DO); Class B minimum is 7 mg/l while Class C is 5 mg/l. More oxygen means a healthier river. When actual water quality exceeds its classification, this leaves room to pollute while still meeting the lower standards.

By law the Board *shall recommend* an upgrade to the legislature when the *actual* water quality meets the standard of the next highest category. Unfortunately, the Board violated the law by refusing (not without some ambivalence) to do so, despite our thorough and superb data showing actual Class B conditions met 100% of the time. None of the eight citizen-nominated classification upgrades were approved by the Board, which only recommended the three Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) nominations to the legislature's Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources (ENR). These three were relatively insignificant upgrades from A to AA.

As a refresher, every three years during a Triennial Review, the DEP solicits and proposes water body proposals for reclassification. They then make staff recommendations to their citizen governing body, the BEP, and the BEP in turn makes recommendations to the ENR Committee, in the form of a Department bill which goes from committee, after a public hearing and work session, to the full legislative body like any other bill.

Continued on next page

Androscoggin Improvement Efforts Continue, continued from page 6

A DEP bill (LD 2187) is going to the ENR Committee with the few upgrades and a number of statutory changes (some of which will make citizen monitoring for the purposes of upgrades nearly impossible). This bill provides a legislative vehicle open for amendments.

We have encouraged and expect an upgrade amendment proposed for LD 2187 to reclassify the upper lower section of Androscoggin River to Class B. Originally, this upgrade was proposed by Grow L+A and supported by intensive data gathering funded by FOMB and the Merrymeeting Bay Chapter of Trout Unlimited. Citizen support of the classification upgrade amendment will be vital to its success.

Upgrade supporters at the last Triennial Review were:

Brunswick, Topsham, Durham, Lewiston, Auburn, Grow L+A, Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, Merrymeeting Bay Trout Unlimited, Natural Resources Council of Maine, Androscoggin Watershed Council, Atlantic Salmon Federation, Trout Unlimited-Maine Council, Downeast Salmon Federation, Friends of Casco Bay, Native Fish Coalition, Friends of Sebago Lake, Androscoggin Land Trust, Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust, and Conservation Law Foundation

We expect continued support from everyone to continue.

Ed Friedman

We Need You! Please Support Our Important Work

FOMB Leadership

Our accomplishments are due to the hard work of dedicated volunteers, especially those who serve on our committees. If you want to get involved and serve, please contact the committee chair or Ed Friedman. We always welcome member input and we'd love for you to join us!

Steering Committee
Ed Friedman, Chair (Bowdoinham)
Vance Stephenson, Treasurer (Beavercreek, OH)
Becky Bowes, Secretary (Brunswick)
Phil Brzozowski (Brunswick)
Nate Gray (Vassalboro)

Education Committee
Betsy Steen, Chair, 666-3468

Conservation and Stewardship Committee
Chair Vacancy

Membership and Fundraising Committee
Nate Gray, Chair, 446-8870

Research and Advocacy Committee
Ed Friedman, Chair, 666-3372

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay · PO Box 233 · Richmond, Maine 04357

Membership Levels

☐ $1,000+ Sturgeon
☐ $750 American Eel
☐ $500 Wild Salmon
☐ $250 Striped Bass
☐ $100 Shad
☐ $50 Alewife
☐ $20 Smelt
☐ Other

Name _____

Address _____

Town/State/Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

☐ $7 Enclosed (optional) for a copy of Conservation Options: A Guide for Maine Land Owners [$5 for book, $2 for postage].

☐ Renewal
☐ New Member
☐ Send information about volunteer opportunities
☐ I would like a FOMB flying ducks sticker

Thanks to Rebecca Bowes for newsletter layout.

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Volunteer Web Help Wanted

After many years of building and maintaining our informative website (excluding the Cybrary run by Stan Moody), as well as coordinating our winter speaker zoom calls and recordings, our dedicated volunteer Martin McDonough is retiring.

Martin has done a fantastic job and deserves a ton of appreciation for keeping this outstanding web resource going. Martin created the site in Adobe Dreamweaver, but for simpler website construction and maintenance, he has been transitioning our existing content to a new WordPress site.

Photo: John Lichter

Are you fluent with WordPress and Zoom?

Could you take over these important web duties?

We need you!

Call Ed at **207-666-3372** or Martin at **207-666-3995.**