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

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Brookfield Kills Fish!



On the cover of our Spring newsletter we ran an old doctored image showing a banner on the Brunswick-Topsham Androscoggin dam proclaiming "Brookfield Kills Fish." As if to prove our point, around October 10–12, thousands of juvenile out-migrating alewives went through the turbines at this dam. As might be expected, the result was a massive case of turbine mortality reminiscent of a similar fish kill in 2016.

This pulse of young-of-the-year (YOY) fish originated in Sabattus Pond, the best alewife spawning habitat in the lower Androscoggin watershed, where they are seasonally stocked by the Department of Marine Resources (DMR). Stocking keeps the run alive and remembering where they return to spawn, hopefully one day without assistance, as Sabattus Stream dams are removed. The Sabattus Public Works Department alerted Brookfield that flashboards atop the dam had been removed to lower the pond level and facilitate young fish leaving. But Brookfield's preparatory measures for incoming YOY initially included only a partial shutdown of turbines, and many thousands of fish died.

The kill was further evidence that physical fish passage (upstream and downstream) at Brunswick is unacceptable, as are Brookfield's current protocols for minimizing or eliminating fish mortality. FOMB and Free the Andro promptly filed complaints with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) who licenses hydroelectric dams. Press coverage of the kill was widespread and included WMTW, WCSH, *Times Record*/*Portland Press Herald*/*Sun Journal*, *Bowdoin Orient*, and autoNotion.

On October 28, FERC sent a letter to Brookfield requesting detailed information on what led to the kill, how Brookfield responded, and what they will do to prevent repeat episodes. Brookfield has 30 days to respond. While the recent kill and that from 2016 are highly visible because of the large schools of fish involved, we must remember this is a chronic problem going largely unnoticed, as most fish are not moving downstream in groups of this size and density. Those deaths remain unseen.

The Brunswick dam is currently in the relicensing process which occurs only every 50 years or so, and now is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the public to intercede and advocate for safe, effective, and efficient migratory fish passage. Please consider extra and significant financial support of FOMB and Free the Andro in our hiring of a fisheries biologist, a fishway engineer, and legal experts to work for safe, effective, and efficient upstream and downstream fish passage in these proceedings.

Ed Friedman

A Fond Farewell

Our dear friend, FOMB member, and environmental colleague, Roger Wheeler of Ipswich, MA and Standish, ME, tragically passed away on August 13, 2026 surrounded by loved ones. He suffered a cardiac arrest of unknown origins while walking his devoted black lab Bella near his home in Ipswich. Our thoughts are with his family.

Roger retired in 2017, after a lifetime working in public education. His interests in the environment were nurtured from early experiences visiting Sebago Lake during summers of the 1960s. Wheeler's father was a geologist, so every walk along his great-great-aunt's shoreline developed his early appreciation for the powers of water, wind, and ice.

In the late 1980s, the SD Warren Paper Company changed their flow management of Sebago Lake. The shoreline-protecting beach quickly eroded away from the longer duration of higher average lake levels throughout the summer and fall. Shoreline residents complained of resulting lake degradation. What happened next for Wheeler was a 30-plus-year learning experience about lake, river, coastal environments, and the politics of water control. Roger helped the organization, Friends of Sebago Lake (FOSL), participate in regulatory actions that advocated restoration of historic natural lake/river flow regimes. He succeeded Steve Kasprzak as President of FOSL in 1998.



Roger and his wife Debra

FOSL asked questions about the impacts of Sebago lake's new altered flows on fisheries, water quality, lake wetlands, and beaches. The group assembled volumes of information as part of the evidence record in the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) file for the Eel Weir project (FERC P- 2984). The FOSL team searched archival records for and retrieved firsthand accounts of anadromous fish, such as salmon, shad, and alewives being present in the Sebago Lake watershed before Sebago Lake was dammed.

This information was crucial in the unanimous decision of the US Supreme Court (*SD Warren v. Maine Board of Environmental Protection*) that required fish passage on Presumpscot River dams and other dams where these fish had been present. This case affirmed that hydroelectric dams were dischargers and subject to Section 401 of the Clean Water Act, which conditions the federal license to operate on compliance set forth in the state's Water Quality Certificate. When FOSL began questioning impacts of the unnatural flow regulation on the riverine, estuarine, and coastal environments downstream from the now highly regulated Sebago Lake, Maine scientists and regulators were silent, oddly showed no interest, or were deflective in their statements.

Citing FOSL as the sole concerned party, FERC refused to include impacts of flow regulation on coastal environments in Sebago Lake relicensing environmental impact statements. Roger and FOSL did not give up and expanded their search, soon uncovering the works of Hans Neu, Michael Rozengurt, and others who understood how dams can detrimentally affect the geosphere, atmosphere, hydrosphere, cryosphere, and the biosphere and are altering our climate and devastating our marine fisheries. (For megadam coverage in FOMB newsletters, please see: Winter 2019, Spring 2019, Winter 2020, Summer 2021, Fall 2021, and Spring 2023.)

Wheeler assisted in the gathering of information for the books, *Blue Deserts* and *Arctic Blue Deserts*, written by Steve Kasprzak, and worked with a team including Friends of Merrymeeting Bay to hire Canadian graduate student Kiran Yendamuri through the Quebec Labrador Foundation internship program to interview still living coworkers and descendants of Hans Neu and retrieve information not available on the internet. That effort was a stunning success.

Roger was an environmental warrior. We could count on each other to be there for support (knowing we each did our advocacy homework) whether for Maine Toxics Action Coalition efforts, dioxin elimination, Sebago Lake watershed restoration, Androscoggin upgrade proposals, the effects of megadams, or anything else for the betterment of Maine's environment and the Gulf of Maine. He is, and will remain, sorely missed.

Ed Friedman

Fall Bay Day



Ziggy the opposum

After a couple of days of much-needed rain, on September 29th at 8 am, the sky stopped leaking as if the weather-gods threw a switch. Volunteers arrived at the Merrymeeting Bay Wildlife Management Area at 8:30, followed by 165 fourth graders from Pittston-Randolph, North Yarmouth Academy, Bowdoinham, Georgetown, and Fisher Mitchell schools.

The students had a great day of fun, getting dirty, and learning about the environment, including how special Merrymeeting Bay is. Workshops included raptors, watershed modeling, environmental art, field sampling techniques, fish migrations, archaeology, and macroinvertebrates, to name just a few. The amount of effort our 50 or so presenters and chaperones put in is just incredible and is what makes Bay Day so successful. Please contact Ed Friedman at 666-3372 if you'd like to be a part of future Bay Days. Our Spring date is May 18th.

Here's what one student wrote:

> *Dear Volunteers, Thank you for inviting us to Merrymeeting Bay. I had an amazing experience, learning new facks about the wetlands and having amazing time there. My favorite part was probably ALL OF IT! The opossum was so cute !! I lerned a lot of new facks, playing with the mud was, well…interesting!! And I saw a lot of new and cool bugs. Sincerely, Melanie*



Eagle
Photo: Corrie Ann Borges

Many thanks to our presenters and helpers: Kathi McCue, Sheri Fraser, Alexis Wheatley, Betsy Steen, Leslie Anderson, Jason Bartlett, Linda Hornbeck, Corrie Ann Borges, Charlotte Agell, Elizabeth Walker, Sherrie York, Katherine Wheeler, Nellie Hollingshead, Bonnie Shippen, Isaak Franklin, Jayson Goranson, Chip Spies, Bonnie Spies, Kent Cooper, Eli Gallant, Justin Sweitzer, Becca Peixotto, Cyndie Lamoreau, Joe Trafton, Kerry Peiser, Carolyn Rowley, Laura Craver-Rogers, Connor White, Carol Nelson, and Mike Birmingham;

And to the chaperones: Mary Kelley, Dan Smith, Steve Musica, Julie Rea, Jim Rea, Jane Yurko, Adele Morgan, Mike Curran, Peter Rubins, Phil Brzozowski, Martha Spiess, Elise Straus-Bowers, Tina Phillips, Becky Bowes, Emmet Murphy, Kerry Collins, Paul Tabor;

And to: Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, Department of Transportation, Department of Marine Resources, Department of Environmental Protection, Maine Master Naturalists, Brunswick Sewer District, Wilderness Miracles, Wild Oats, and Ideal Portable Toilets.

Photos: Ed Friedman, except where noted



Archaeology



Predatory seal



Beach seining

Something Very Different, Times Two

My father and I spent a Sunday doing chores around the farm. My parents had rented this place a few years before. It perched atop Eugly Hill in Nobleboro. This late colonial farm has a lot of history. You can feel it. Had things worked out a little differently, we'd probably have wound up buying the property, but the owners at the time were unwilling to sell. They had set off on a pilgrimage to Africa to spread the gospel. They planned on coming back in another 2 years.

Meanwhile, we had the run of the place. And what a place—the view was stunning. You could see the Camden Hills plain as day from the living room picture window. My brother Paul got married there the summer before. My sister kept a small remuda of horses in the barn with ample pasture for them to wander and graze. We had chickens, ducks, and geese, too. It was a great place to spend summer; there was always something to do.

Today was no different. My mother and sister were off in Connecticut on business. My job was to mow the lawn and dead-head the flowers around the house, then I'd feed the horses. As I mowed back and forth, my father came out to check on my progress. He walked along the flower beds on the grass I'd already cut. I watched as he knelt next to the flower bed and stared intently at something. Curious, I stopped mowing and walked over to see what he was looking at. I figured it was a snake. He didn't like snakes.

As I approached, I could see what he was looking at. It was an egg. A very large white egg. A goose egg. He reached and picked up the egg. At this point I'd like to point out that science tells us that nothing can be faster than the speed of light. I know from personal experience that there *are* things that can go faster. Light travels 186,000 miles per second. That's quick. But an exploding rotten goose egg and the resulting epic stench is much faster than the speed of light.

The egg exploded in dad's hand with an audible pop. The smell reached my nose before the egg appeared to explode or the "pop" reached my ear. Faster than the speed of light. My dad doubled over retching uncontrollably while simultaneously trying to rid his hand of the unbelievably foul fluid. I turned and bolted away trying to rid my nose of the stink. I watched my father wipe his hands on the grass and stagger off a few feet trying desperately to move away and not vomit.



Image: poultryhatch.com

"Booby trap! Damned geese!" he croaked.

He headed over to the hose and turned it on, washing off his befouled hand. Then he sprayed where the egg detonated. The stench lessened somewhat. Dad kept gagging off and on.

Satisfied that he'd done all he could with the hose, he stowed it back on its holder and disappeared into the kitchen of the farmhouse.

He returned a few moments later with the ash bucket from the wood cook stove. He applied a liberal coating of wood ash to the affected area. The smell lessened again. He returned the bucket to the kitchen and then joined me outside.

"Wow, that was bad!" he said, eyes still watering. You could still readily smell the hydrogen sulfide odor, but nothing compared to the original assault. I got off easy. He was at ground zero. He WAS ground zero.

"Did you get any on your clothes?" I asked. He looked down at his blue Dickies and boots. "I don't think I did, or it would stink terrible still."

Continued on next page

"Something Very Different, Times Two" continued from page 4

He was right, I guess, though I believe my nose had been struck dumb by the initial attack and his, too. He mimed some retching moves, and we both laughed hard. In hindsight it was funny as all get out. For years we'd recall that event and have a good laugh. I was 16 years old. Just writing about this event brings back memories so powerful that I think I can still smell that smell. But the day was young, and there was so much more to come.

I continued to mow the lawn until done and dead-headed the flower beds to perfection, except the area around ground zero. I stayed away from there. It took days for the smell to go away. I fed the horses, chickens, and geese. I lugged water out to them all. Every once in a while, I'd smell the nuclear goose egg and couldn't tell if it was really the smell or my nose memory at work.

Dad and I had a light supper of left-over baked beans, coleslaw, johnny cake, and ham for supper and headed off to our bedrooms. I was rereading JRR Tolkien's *The Hobbit* for the third time late into the night. I love that book. Such a good story, and like all good stories it has some human connection to the soul. Poor Bilbo Baggins had just fallen into the goblins' lair and met Gollum for the first time. "Riddles in the Dark" is the name of the chapter. If Bilbo fails to solve Gollum's riddle, then Gollum eats Bilbo. If Bilbo wins the riddle contest, then Gollum must show him the way out of the goblins' lair.

I heard footsteps on the stairs...There are 12 steps. Creak, clump, clump, clump, creak—and then silence.

I heard footsteps on the stairs coming up. I paused reading to listen. It was my father coming back up from the bathroom downstairs. There are 12 steps. Creak, clump, clump, clump, creak, and then silence.

Funny, I didn't hear him go downstairs. Our bedroom doors sit opposite one another at a small landing at the top. I can see my father paused outside my door seeing light streaming from below it. Silence. I thought for sure I'd see the doorknob turn and his head pop in. Nothing. Silence.



I slipped from beneath the covers and very quietly approached the door. Silent? No, but damn close to silent. I reached out and gently wrapped my hand around the knob and waited. Nothing. I very gently turned the knob and felt the door release. I held it shut and waited. Finally, I couldn't stand it and yanked the door open.

Across the landing my father's door whipped open, and we stood 6 feet apart staring at one another. "Were you just downstairs?" I asked. He shook his head, and we both peered down the stairwell into the first-floor darkness.

My mother and sister came home later in the week. We were eating supper around the table and catching up. My father began to tell our goose egg and "stairs" story when my sister said, "Oh, you met the ghost?" My father and I looked at each other. "What ghost?" I blurted. My sister had spent far more time at the farm than any of us. She lived there year-round. "Oh, this place is haunted for sure. Those stairs are really active."

My sister had a bedroom on the first floor adjacent to the stairs, and she'd heard footsteps on the stairs regularly. The dogs were used to it and would not bark. At least they wouldn't bark at the phantom stair climber. Strangely, she told us, the ghost only climbed the stairs. Never descended. My father and I agreed with her.

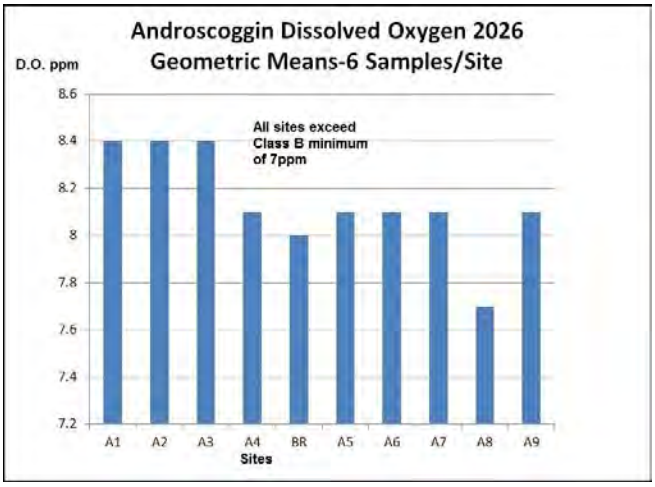
The farm has long since changed hands, and new people live there now. I swung in the drive this past summer. The massive barn that had once housed horses, chickens, and geese has long since collapsed. The house is still there though. So is the view. I was hoping the new owners would be there, so I could introduce myself ... and ask about the stairs.

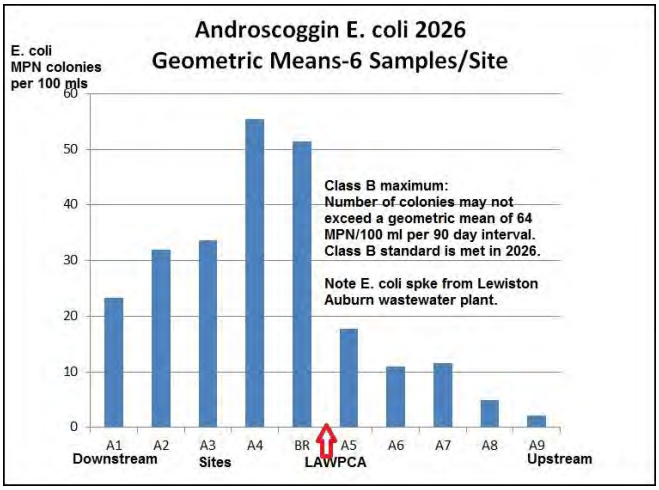
Nate Gray

Research and Advocacy Updates

Suit to Lock in Improved Water Quality on Androscoggin River

On June 18, FOMB filed suit in federal court challenging the Maine Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) misuse of antidegradation policy under the Clean Water Act (CWA). Antidegradation policies were designed to improve water quality, lock in existing quality, and prevent backsliding of water quality. The lawsuit specifically addresses actions of the DEP in refusing to upgrade portions of the lower Androscoggin River and also targets the Board of Environmental Protection (BEP) which has ignored the statute requiring them to recommend to the legislature reclassifications based on actual water quality. Finally, the suit charges the EPA with abusing their discretion by ignoring their mandate to supervise the antidegradation policy implementation they have delegated to states. The June 18 complaint was brought under the Administrative Procedures Act (APA), and on June 27 FOMB submitted a companion 60-day Notice of Intent (NOI) to file a citizen suit under the Clean Water Act (CWA) against the EPA for their failure to act on these issues. On September 14 we filed an amended complaint with consent of all parties, combining the APA and CWA claims into one lawsuit. Read about the initial filing in our June 22 Press Release. On October 30 we received motions to dismiss from EPA and DEP defendants. We have until November 30 to respond. Continued sampling in 2026 showed the upper lower section of Androscoggin continues to surpass Class B standards.





Little if Any Progress on BNAS PFAS Cleanup

Recent PFAS sampling on August 18 and 19 by FOMB on and around the former Brunswick Naval Air Station (BNAS) continues to show extraordinarily high levels of PFAS chemicals on site and working their way through the Brunswick Sewer District (BSD) into the Androscoggin River and most certainly into sewage sludge, although FOMB has never tested sludge (euphemistically called biosolids now by the industry and regulatory agencies). The EPA has finalized enforceable drinking water Maximum Contaminant Limits (MCLs) for PFAS types (see chart). In a pit outside Hangar 4, part of the BSD system, we found total PFAS levels of 504,380 ppt! Clearly, neither the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority (MRRA) nor the Navy have cleaned this pit out, so water flows through to the BSD. FOMB continues monitoring in this area, making the public aware and pressuring the Navy and MRRA to clean up this mess. All of our PFAS sampling results can be found on the Chemical page of our Cybrary. Also, Military Poisons has provided a good summary of our latest findings.

Select	**MCL in ppt**	**Parts per trillion (ppt)**
PFAS Type	**EPA Drinking H20**	**BNAS Hangar 4 Pit**
PFOA	4	2,100
PFOS	4	30,439
PFHxS	10	11,541
PFNA	10	207
GenX	10	<1
Hazard Index MCL (2 or more of these types)	**1**	**504,380 Total (55 types)**

Continued on next page

"Research and Advocacy Updates" continued from page 1

Green Crabs

Following Department of Marine Resources (DMR) reports of a green crab caught in two different beach seining events off Centers Pt., we borrowed three crab traps from Manomet Conservation Sciences to see what we could catch, if anything. Green crabs are a notorious invasive species wreaking havoc on our coastal shell fisheries. On our first sampling in September we set one trap each in the upper Bay at the south end of Swan Island, middle Bay at Centers Pt., and lower Bay on the west side of Lines Island. Over the course of a couple of days (two 24-hour sets), we caught two pumpkin seed fish and a juvenile smallmouth bass in the lower Bay and two mud crabs and a bizarre dragonhunter dragonfly nymph at Centers Pt. In our November set of two days with all three traps at Centers Pt., we caught two tomcod in one and a pumpkinseed fish and juvenile smallmouth bass in another. Thanks to Marissa McMahan at Manomet for the traps and advice and Dave Mention for use of his skiff!

Ed Friedman



Dragonhunter dragonfly nymph



Mud crab

Photos: 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)

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Chair Vacancy

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

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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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Mouth of the Androscoggin River at Merrymeeting Bay
Photo: John Lichter

"A whole river is mountain country and hill country and flat country and swamp and delta country, is rock bottom and sand bottom and weed bottom and mud bottom, is blue, green, red, clear, brown, wide, narrow, fast, slow, clean, and filthy water, is all the kinds of trees and grasses and all the breeds of animals and birds and man that pertain and have ever pertained to its changing shores…"

John Graves, *Goodbye to a River*