

Merrymeeting News

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

SUMMER 1999

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

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay is a 501c3 nonprofit organization. Support comes from members' tax-deductible donations and grants.

Education

Hands Around the Bay, Speaker Series, field trips.

Conservation & Stewardship

Protecting natural resources through private and public ownership, easements and stewardship.

Membership Events

Swan Island Picnic, paddle tours of the Bay, field trips, conservation meetings, potluck suppers and shoreline clean-ups.

Research and Advocacy

Water quality, data collection, toxics, fisheries restoration.

1999 Steering Committee

Frank Burroughs, Bowdoinham
Dana Cary, Topsham
Andy Cutko, Bowdoinham
Ed Friedman, Bowdoinham
Kathleen Kenny, Dresden
Esther Lacognata, Topsham
Peter Lea, Brunswick
Bob Lenna, Bowdoinham
Pat Maloney, Topsham
Kathleen McGee, Bath
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Mark Milam, Woolwich
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Karin Tilberg, Bowdoinham

Executive Director

Betsy Ham, Bowdoinham

On-Line

<http://www.col.k12.me.us/mmb/fomb@gwi.net>

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

PADDLE TRIPS AND MAINE RIVERS CELEBRATION

JULY 25-JULY 27 KENNEBEC RIVER TRIP

Celebrate the newly reborn Kennebec River with a three day paddle (pick one day or paddle all three) from the partially removed Edwards Dam to Chops Point. This mini Trek will meet the Androscoggin Trek to the Sea on July 27 at Chops Point where we will have a kick-off Party for Maine Rivers (see below).

- Sunday July 25: Paddle from Augusta to Gardiner (6 miles) Put-in at Augusta Waterfront Park Boat Launch (east side of river) at 2 pm.
- Monday July 26: Paddle from Gardiner to Richmond (10 miles) Put-in at the Gardiner Boat Launch (west side of river in downtown Gardiner) at 3:30 pm. Bring a bag supper.
- Tuesday July 27: Paddle from Richmond to Chops Point (9 Miles). Put in at the Richmond Boat landing at 1:30 pm.

JULY 27 BAY SECTION OF THE ANDROSCOGGIN RIVER SOURCE TO THE SEA CANOE TREK.

Meet at the Brunswick Boat Launch at 1pm to paddle down the Androscoggin and across the Bay to Chops Point. Russ Cohen, wild edible plant specialist, will paddle with us and help us forage along the way. Paddlers will arrive at Chops Point in time for the Maine Rivers Celebration at 5 pm. For more information on the rest of the trek beginning on July 10 at the headwaters of the Androscoggin call 824-0191 or (603) 466-2524.

JULY 27 MAINE RIVERS SUMMER KICK-OFF PARTY.

5-7:30 PM AT CHOPS POINT SCHOOL IN WOOLWICH.

Come join the celebration of the newly formed group Maine Rivers. Maine Rivers is a group of people working together to protect our rivers whose mission is to "unite, promote and strengthen the efforts of citizens and watershed organizations to restore and protect Maine's river systems." Whether you join the canoe and kayak trips to Chops Point (see above) or drive to the school, we welcome you to share good food, beautiful views, and river stories with paddlers, river rats and anglers from around the region. Food and stories will be provided. Family and friends are welcome.

Please preregister, free of charge, for the Kennebec and Androscoggin trips and the Maine Rivers Kick-off Party by calling Friends of Merrymeeting Bay at 666-3376 or through email at fomb@gwi.net. We look forward to seeing you on the river for some summer time fun.

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A VERY MERRY MEETING ON THE BAY

What a wonderful day full of learning and fun we had on May 20 for our "A Merry Meeting on the Bay Day". The drizzle added to the quiet of the morning with so many young people (over 200!) from schools all around the Bay hidden behind well organized and thoughtful volunteers. Kids observing, exploring, digging, searching, discovering, building and getting wet without complaint!

There were so many good things that happened that day at Chop Point School that we couldn't possibly record or even get around to see all of them but here are a few happenings that Pat Maloney (chief in charge) really enjoyed:

Peter Lea taught Dawn Wyman's second graders from the William Cone School about orienteering skills using maps, rocks and compasses. Ask a Topsham eight-year-old how to get there from here and they just might set you on the right course.

Andy Cutko with Rhonda Weaver's 4th grade class from Woodside School found a message in a bottle. Sounds like an idea for a movie but down river from here.

Nancy and Bob Curtis' soil from their truck looked like a farmer's market to me. All those children brought home a plant.

Thanks to Mike Cline, Susan Hayward and Steve Pelletier who helped the children gather some data on flora they

**Ask a Topsham
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from here and
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observed. Watch our Web Site for the census count.

Jim Cliff teacher from Marcia Buker school in Richmond has already contacted us for more of Linwood Rideout and hopes for another trip to Chops Point and the Bay.

Mr. and Mrs. Fish made everyone laugh and learn as they pretended to swim into the Bay and "eat" each other.

Overall it was a great experience for all involved and would not have been possible with out the help of the many volunteers. A very special thanks to Frank Hayward and all the staff at the Chops Point School for letting us use (overrun!) their facilities while school was still in session. I would like to particularly thank the Education Committee who organized the event with Pat Maloney as Chair and Mark Milam and Rosi Armstrong as hard working members. Betsy Steen put together a wonderful flora and fauna check list for us and is helping us to put the results on the Web. Nancy Marstaller, Michelle Barabe, Sarah Stapler and Lisa Shano did the drawings for our coloring book. Thank you to our volunteer guides: Bob and Nancy Curtis, Peter Lea, Don Lipfert, Steve Pelletier, Peter Milholland, Mark Milam, Anne Hammond, Linwood Rideout, Jay Robbins, Mike Cline, Andy Cutko, Bob Elliott, Susan Hayward and to our volunteers that assisted the guides: Natalie and Fritz Kempner, Bob Dale, Jean Parker, Theresa Torrent-Ellis, Kathleen Kenny, David Hunt, Kathleen McGee, Mike Hill, Helen Boyton, Karen Tilbor, Helen Watts, Liz Webster, Carla Rensenbrink, Lala Carothers, Dana Cary, and last but certainly not least Ed Friedman.



Steve Pelletier leads Sharon Turnbail's fifth & sixth graders on a nature walk with Bob Dale's (far right) assistance

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Merrymeeting News

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

Merrymeeting News is sent to FOMB members and other friends of the Bay. For information call Betsy Ham, Executive Director 666-3376.

SIXTH ANNUAL SWAN ISLAND SUMMER PICNIC AUGUST 14-15

Swan Island is a place rich in history and natural beauty. Each time I go there for the Annual Swan Island Picnic I feel that I have stepped back in time with the houses and fields much as they were in the eighteen hundreds when Swan Island was a thriving community. We almost always see deer, wild turkey and eagles. Though it is only a few miles from most of our homes, a visit to Swan Island is truly a visit to another world.

Explore and celebrate Swan Island with us on FOMB's sixth annual Summer Picnic and Overnight. We are planning many exciting events including a Saturday lunch speaker, tours of Swan Island by foot, truck, kayak and canoe, wildlife watching, plant identification, overnight camping, songs around the fire, star gazing and of course good food and good company. You may join us for the day on Saturday or camp overnight.

Saturday Day Visitors and Overnights:

Meet: 9:30 AM to register at the State Dock in Richmond.

Highlights: Luncheon speaker, tours of the Island by truck and hikes on the nature trails, evening singing around the campfire. A fun filled day on a beautiful, historic island in the Bay.

Bring: Utensils and plates (preferably reusable) and a dish to share for potluck lunch Saturday noon. Overnights bring a dish for potluck dinner Saturday evening and all the gear you need to sleep out.

FOMB will provide: Drinks for all meals; hot-dogs, beans, s'more fixings and a fire for Saturday evening.



Day Guests Depart: In the afternoon after the tour of the island. If you can't be flexible about departure times, please bring your own canoe or kayak so that you can leave when you need to (low tide at 10:30 am).

Sunday:

Bring: Your own breakfast, snacks etc.

FOMB will provide: drinks

Depart: Approximately 11 am, if you can not be flexible about departure times or wish to stay later bring your own canoe or kayak (Low tide will be at 11:30 am) so that you can leave when you wish.

Everyone should come prepared for the usual sun, bugs, rain and coolness. Inland Fisheries and Wildlife will provide water and firewood, and a boat ride to and from the island for those without kayaks or canoes. We will have to carry out all that we carry in so pack carefully and bring lots of reusable materials to cut down on our trash.

There are 10 Adirondack lean-tos each sleeping 4-6 people but we recommend you bring your own tent or a lean-to bug net (yes, they make them) to keep the bugs out of your sleeping area. The Picnic will happen rain or shine so please come prepared.

The entire island will be reserved Saturday night for Friends of Merrymeeting Bay. This is a great opportunity to get to know other FOMB members and their guests or to become a new member. Families with children are encouraged to come and enjoy this beautiful area.

Please register in advance by cutting out and mailing in the attached form by August 10. Late registration may be available by phone at 666-3376 but space is limited so try to register early. If you cancel after August 10 we will request that you donate part of your refund to FOMB to pay for the expense of organizing the event.

We look forward to seeing you there!



CLIP AND MAIL

6th Annual Swan Island Summer Picnic
Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, P.O. Box 233, Richmond, Maine 04357

I/we would like to attend the SUMMER PICNIC and events on Saturday, August 14.
\$6 per person / \$18 per family # of people: _____ Amount enclosed: _____

I/we would like to attend the SUMMER PICNIC & CAMP OVERNIGHT Sat & Sun Aug. 14 - 15.
\$12 per person / \$30 per family # of people: _____ Amount enclosed: _____
(For families larger than 4 persons add \$5.00 per each additional family member.)

I would like to join Friends of Merrymeeting Bay. Enclosed \$ 15 annual dues.

I enclose \$25 \$50 \$100 Other \$ _____ as a tax-deductible contribution to FOMB.

Please make checks payable to
Friends of Merrymeeting Bay.

Your Name(s)

Address

State/ZIP

Phone

TIDINGS/SUMMER

The 1830's saw the first major damming of the Kennebec. By the middle of the decade, there were four dams between Skowhegan and Waterville, two of which completely obstructed the river. By the end of the decade, the Augusta dam was in place. It was impassable to fish, except for the occasional salmon or alewife that made its way up through the navigational lock at the eastern end of the dam. Eventually, a fishway would be built, but it was badly designed and proved useless.

A drift-netter named Charles Hume plyed his trade on the river at Waterville from 1830 to 1837, averaged 150 salmon a season, and estimated the total annual catch in that section of the river to be around 2,000. In 1838, the Augusta dam being completed, he moved downriver and had himself a banner year, getting between 300 and 400 of the suddenly dispossessed and disoriented salmon that milled around below the dam. But that was nearly the end of it—the Kennebec salmon, cut off from their spawning grounds, had no future. He kept at it—it is the nature of fishermen to keep at it—but by 1850 was catching no more than four or five salmon a year, and some years none at all.

We can only suppose that faith, force of habit, and the refusal of memory to accept loss as ever being entire and irrevocable brought him back to the river each spring, to play his nets out across the current and drift down with them, watching the floats and hoping. The same stubbornness or stupidity afflicted the fish—the few that Mr.

Hume would catch, and the few that, all these years later, still show up from time to time at the foot of the Edwards dam, or venture up into Bond Brook. They seem not much more, or much less, than ghosts, drawn back to their old haunts, and occasioning a shiver of excitement and incredulity among those who happen to see them.

In 1867, the Twelfth Annual Report of the Maine Board of Agriculture addressed the freshwater fisheries of the state. Earlier reports, particularly that of 1864, had touched on the subject, but this was an altogether more extensive undertaking. Its authors, Nathan W. Foster and Charles G. Atkins, were not concerned about conservation *per se*, or about recreational angling. They reflected the imperatives of a rural and regional economy, one that had the production of food as the basis of most of its wealth and most of its worries. They were practical men.

They had what must have been an enviable summer. They traveled and talked to old-timers, many of whom, like Mr. Hume, had fished and observed fish for all of their lives, and had kept good records. They ascended rivers and inspected spawning sites. They were especially concerned with anadromous fish, because of their greater commercial potential but also because all species were in drastic decline. They provided helpful diagrams of the deep and shallow water weirs used on the Kennebec—weirs that, by 1867, hardly caught enough fish to cover the cost of their construction, much less of the fisherman's labor, and so provided another evidence of how fishing, for those who are addicted to it, is a calling in life, and not just a job.

Virtually all of the fishermen they consulted had other, presumably more viable, ways of earning a living—like so many Mainers of that time, and even some few of today, the fishermen were jacks of many trades.

Atkins and Foster identified three major problems. In order of severity, these were impassable dams, overfishing, and industrial pollution. They recommended the building of fishways, with specific suggestions and cost estimates for each dam. They advised various restrictions on the times and techniques of fishing for various species in various waters. They urged a careful consideration of the introduction of new species (e.g., large and smallmouth bass) into the state, and the wider dissemination of the Sebago salmon—our familiar landlocked salmon—be-



June 18: The temporary [coffer] dam is completed allowing access to the west end of Edwards Dam for heavy equipment to remove a 75 foot section.

yond its original, and quite limited, range. With regard to industrial pollution, they suggested, alas, no action, but only further study of the problem—what else is new?

And so this year, the Edwards dam at Augusta comes down. There have been a lot of changes in the Bay and the Kennebec since Atkins and Foster wrote their report. This spring, I have fished in the Kennebec at Waterville and further upriver, around the Forks, and have caught brook trout, rainbow trout, brown trout, splake, landlocked salmon, and smallmouth bass. Of these, only the brook trout would have been in the river in 1867. The rainbows were originally indigenous to the American west, the browns to Europe, the landlocked salmon to the Sebago or St. Croix watersheds, and the smallmouths to the Great Lakes region. The splake, a brook trout-togue hybrid, is a new species, developed in Canada.

In the tidal water below Augusta, striped bass had once been so abundant that Foster and Atkins heard how “in Dresden, on the Eastern River, they were once taken in such numbers as to sink the ice on which they were deposited”—a proof, incidentally, that large numbers of stripers used to overwinter in the Bay. But by the time they wrote their report, stripers were rare throughout Maine, with only occasional small ones showing up. So we can count as real progress the current abundance of these splendid fish, and their resumption of spawning in the Bay. The situation with regard to shad is very different. Although in serious decline, they continued to be caught in significant numbers in 1867; and even today people in Bowdoinham can remember when they were still common enough in the spring to be accepted at the country store as a regular item of barter, back during the Depression, when money was in short supply. But this year, only about 75 have come through the fishway on the Androscoggin, and it remains to be seen whether this fine fish survives in sufficient numbers to profit from the reopening of its historic spawning grounds upriver from Augusta.

The eel fishery was not deemed worthy of mention by Foster and Atkins, and it may not have existed at all. Now, it, with smelt fishing, is the only commercial fishing left in the Bay, and its future is threatened by the harvesting of elvers, which has become something between an



July 1: A section of the coffer dam is removed by an excavator bucket christened with a bottle of champagne. The trickle of the Kennebec quickly increases to a torrent as it erodes the gravel dam and roars through the Edwards breach.

epidemic and an orgy in the last few years. The Bay’s most obvious fish, the carp, is another alien, put there sometime around the turn of the century with the idea that it might replace the decimated native species as a food source, one that had a high tolerance for pollution. With the removal of the dam, carp too will have access to new territory, and be able to go all the way up to the southern edge of Waterville, where an excellent brown trout fishery—some say the best in the east—has developed. What effect they will have on the trout, on the many smallmouth bass that are in that section of the river, and how each of these species in turn will affect or be affected by the return of anadromous fish is not something that can confidently be predicted. Human history sees to it that natural history does not stand still. A salmon, shad, or striper returning to its ancestral waters above Augusta will be like Rip Van Winkle waking up from his long nap, and will find that many things have changed, and that many strangers have made themselves at home there.

So there are uncertainties. But we can say with certainty that the removal of the Edwards dam will be, in more ways than we can now foresee, one of the true and few watershed events of our lives in this place, and one that will have many implications for other lives in other places.

Frank Burroughs
Tidings is a regular feature of Merrymeeting News

MONITOR NEWS

FOMB has had a very successful launching of the new water quality monitoring program with the enthusiastic support of our volunteers. I would like to especially thank Dave Hedrick, Jim Thibodeau, Dee and Clancy Cummins, Bob Curtis, Norma Peck, Bill Milam and Shaye McGann for successfully completing our training program and for their commitment to test the waters of the Bay and its tributaries once a month during the ice free season.

We currently have five testing sites on the Kennebec: Motherwell Point (just below the Chops), Abby Point (aka Browns Point), Richmond, Hallowell and Waterville. There is also a site on the Androscoggin above the dam, and we are also working to establish a site below Brunswick on the Androscoggin. At each of the sites volunteer monitors are conducting tests to determine dissolved oxygen levels, pH, temperature, turbidity (water clarity) and in some cases salinity. We have volunteers at each site but we are still looking for back up volunteers at the Hallowell, Richmond and Androscoggin sites.

The Kennebec Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited will provide test kits & volunteers for sites on the Kennebec in Waterville & above. FOMB is providing the training, quality control and data collation. This is a wonderful partnership that will allow us to build a more conclusive picture of the activities on and around the Kennebec which most effect the water quality of Merrymeeting Bay.

If you would like to fund the water quality monitoring effort at your favorite river site, test kits cost FOMB about \$200.00 (including training materials and spare parts) per site. The more kits we can fund the more effective our data collecting will be on Merrymeeting Bay and its tributaries.

To help better understand the overall health of the bay, fecal coliform testing is being added to our program. To this end we are receiving assistance from the Department of Marine Resources (DMR). They were very interested in our monitoring program and in testing samples collected by FOMB volunteers in their lab facilities. The lack of information for this area was made very clear to them last year when the Winslow

sewer line broke and there was little to no baseline data as reference to determine impact in the coastal region. We will be collecting water samples to be tested by DMR for fecal coliform once a month on a Sunday at each of the testing sites. We need volunteers to do this new sampling.

Each day that we are out testing and answering questions about our role as water quality monitors we are increasing the awareness of others. I find it a very rewarding way to be ambassadors for Merrymeeting Bay.



Theresa Torrent-Ellis, Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Coordinator, tests the waters of the bay

WATER QUALITY MONITORING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

WHAT: Volunteers needed to monitor dissolved oxygen levels, pH, temperature, turbidity (water clarity) and in some cases salinity.

WHERE: Hallowell or Richmond boatlandings or the Androscoggin (sites to be chosen).

COMMITMENT: 4 to 6 hr. of initial training then testing once a month (choose from one of 4 days to test).

NEXT TRAINING DATE: July 18th from 1-5pm

WHAT: collecting water samples to be tested by DMR for fecal coliform.

WHERE: Sites on the Kennebec and the Androscoggin.

COMMITMENT: 1-2 hr. of initial training then sample taking once a month on a Sunday. Delivery of the samples that day to Bowdoinham or left at convenient drop off sites to be picked up.

If you are interested in any of these volunteer opportunities please call 666-5803

CLEAN-UP DAY A BIG SUCCESS

Our volunteer clean-up crew tackled a big and messy job this year near the Abagadasset River just off of Rt. 24 in Bowdoinham on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife land. What a mess; sewing machines, hot water tanks, tires and more tires, bikes—you name it we cleaned it up. Inland Fisheries and Wildlife provided a truck and driver, Steve Saucier, who pitched in to help us get the job done. He had to make two trips! David Berry at Bowdoinham Recycling kindly took all the scrap metal. Thank you to all the hardworking volunteers including: Ed Friedman, Kathleen McGee and son Ryan, John Ferdico and son Rocky, Ben Hunsberger with his son and daughter, Jay Robbins with daughter Fenna, Nina and Holly Whitney and Dan Coker.

HELPING FOMB MAY REDUCE YOUR TAXES

As most of you know all cash contribution to FOMB are tax deductible but did you also know that we can accept other types of gifts which may help reduce your tax burden? Here are some examples of other ways you can give to Friends of Merrymeeting Bay:

Conservation Easements

Depending on your personal financial situation a gift of a conservation easement to FOMB can reduce your estate, property and income taxes.

Estate Planning

There are a variety of estate planning vehicles which can benefit nonprofits such as Friends of Merrymeeting Bay. Conservation Easements mentioned above may assist you in the planning of your estate and reduce your estate taxes if a significant portion of your income is

tied up in land. Wills and bequests are another tool in estate planning which can benefit Friends of Merrymeeting Bay. If you would like to bequest a certain sum of money to FOMB, consult your lawyer or call us for some suggested wording.

Gifts of Stock

Certain appreciated stocks can be significant gifts to FOMB. These gifts may, at the same time, allow you to claim an income tax deduction and/or eliminate the capital gains taxes you would have paid if you had sold the appreciated stock.

All these potential tax savings options greatly benefit Friends of Merrymeeting Bay by allowing us to continue to work towards our mission of preserving, protecting and improve the natural ecosystems of Merrymeeting Bay. How they benefit you will depend on your personal financial situation. If you are interested in pursuing any of these options consult your financial advisor. We would be happy to provide you with more information if you call 666-3376. Thank you for your generous support.

ON OUR WEBSITE

We have recently added Tom Squier's report on Shortnose and Atlantic Sturgeon in the bay. Check it out at <http://www.col.k12.me.us/mmb/>



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

MEMBERSHIP LEVELS.

- \$15.00 enclosed for individual membership. \$20 Family
- \$30 Smelt \$50 Alewife \$100 Striped Bass \$250 Salmon \$500+ Sturgeon
- \$ _____ enclosed as an additional tax-deductible donation.

NAME _____

RR# OR STREET ADDRESS _____

TOWN / STATE/ ZIP _____

PHONE _____

\$6.00 enclosed for a copy of **Conservation Options: A Guide for Maine Landowners.** (\$5 for the book, \$1 for postage)

- Renewal Gift From:

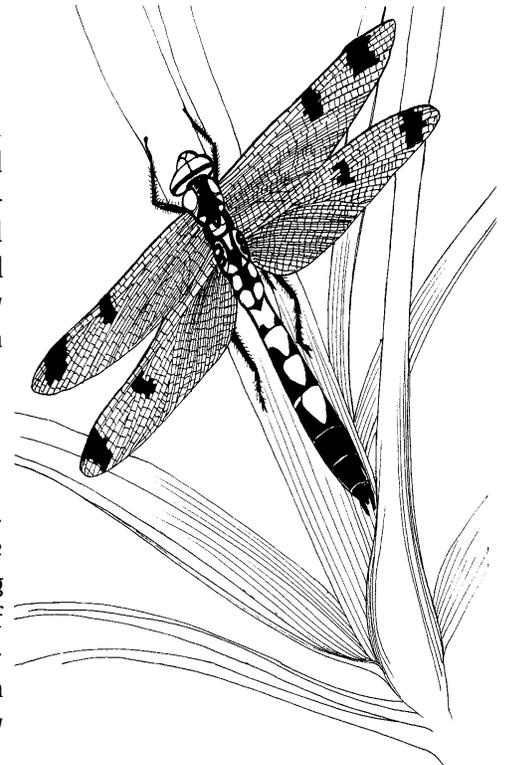
CALENDAR *(con't from first page)*

AUGUST 14-15 ANNUAL SWAN ISLAND PICNIC AND OVERNIGHT

(see page 3 for more information). Meet at the State Boat Launch in Richmond on Saturday August 14 at 9:30 am. Day guests will depart before dinner time, overnights will depart 11am on Sunday. Highlights include a noontime speaker on Saturday followed by a truck tour of the Island. Overnights will enjoy songs around the campfire. Ample opportunity for all to enjoy good company and explore Swan Island. You must register by filling out the form on page 3.

AUGUST 24 NATURE WALK ALONG THE SHORES OF MERRYMEETING BAY FROM 4:30-7PM

with Andy Cutko, Ecologist for the Maine Natural Areas Program. The shores of Merrymeeting Bay and its tributaries harbor a wide variety of plants, some of them globally rare. Join us for the evening and discover the rich variety and beauty of the Bay for yourself with the assistance of Andy Cutko, ecologist, who spent last summer surveying the rare plants of the Bay. Meet at the Bowdoinham Town Landing. Group size is limited, so please pre-register by calling 666-3376 or 666-3162.



Thank you to: David Hansen for designing this issue of MMNews.



FRIENDS of MERRYMEETING BAY

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SIXTH ANNUAL SWAN ISLAND PICNIC AUGUST 14-15

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