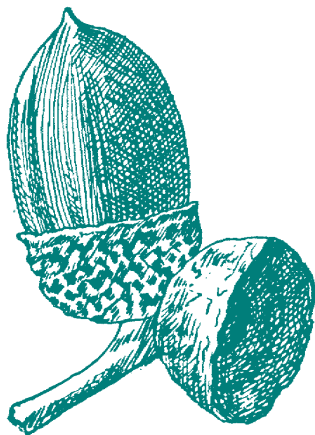


The Merrymeeting News



Fall 2006 VOLUME XVI, No. 3

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



Friends of Merrymeeting Bay

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

Education

Conservation & Stewardship

Membership Events

Research & Advocacy

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

www.friendsofmerrymeetingbay.org

The Merrymeeting News is published seasonally by Friends of Merrymeeting Bay (FOMB) and is sent to FOMB members and other friends of the Bay.

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Executive Coordinator; 721-0941



Fall Bay Day '06



Volunteer Sarah Rodgers with young archaeologists

Photo: Petey Ambrose

What do you get when you combine the resource-rich Merrymeeting Bay Wildlife Management Area (MBWMA), 34 bay-loving volunteers, and 156 enthusiastic 4th graders? A fun and educational Fall Bay Day! On September 26, Friends of Merrymeeting Bay celebrated another successful Fall Bay Day with local students.

Bay Day, held in the fall at the MBWMA and in the spring at Chop Point School, brings Merrymeeting Bay's environmental challenges and splendors to local classrooms, or better stated, vice versa. This fall, students learned about such topics as archaeology, geology, non-point source water pollution, nature-inspired art, diadromous fish, macro-invertebrates, ecology, watersheds, and Bay wildlife.

Bay Days (and the pre-Bay Day orientations for participating classrooms) are just one program offered through our Hands Around the Bay School Outreach Program. All programs are free of charge thanks to volunteers, member support, and grants. Our 2006 Bay Days were supported in large part by a generous grant from Bowdoin College's Common Good Grant program.

Many thanks to Paul Dumdey, Kathleen McGee, Petey Ambrose, Kent Cooper, John Ambrose, Fritz Kempner, Joan Llorente, Kathie Duncan, Carla Rensenbrink, Sarah Rodgers, Whit Blair, Dick Nickerson, Fae Silverman, Holly Cooney, Dana Cary, Andy Cutko, Brooke Wilkerson, Mark Mahnke, Susan Elias, Jamie Silvestri, Jason Blais and Kirsten Hebert of the Maine Rural

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So Goes the Alewife

I stood on the banks of a small stream in mid-Maine to watch. The time was approaching when the alewives would ascend this stream to the ponds above. The alewives I watched for were born here and should now be attempting to return to complete another cycle in their lives. Spawning. It was this way throughout the eons until the arrival of European colonists. On the eastern seaboard nearly every suitable stream or river was dammed to provide hydro-mechanical power. It was a necessity in those early days. It was a renewable base means of commerce; the fabric that allowed the colonies to not merely exist but to thrive.

The water I've worked on and watched for the past eight years or so had been devoid of the alewife for 160 plus years. Those alewives had been extirpated. Victims of ever increasing need for power. In fact, a record of these alewives exists in the library of congress. This very same water in 1755 became a hotbed of controversy. Locals who relied on the return of the alewives as a food and fertilizer source were alarmed to find that the alewives had been cut off from their spawning grounds by a dam built to saw wood and mill grain. Of course, if you cut the fish off from where they need to be in order to spawn it will be four to five years at most and you will have zero alewives. The locals petitioned the General Court of Massachusetts. In the end it was another dam that sealed their fate. A massive structure built in Augusta, a dam of wood, concrete and cobble a quarter mile long providing hydro-mechanical power to a textile mill. The mill provided jobs for hundreds of workers and was a mainstay of the local economy for a century plus.

It wasn't the end for just the alewives either. Many other species of anadromous fish utilized this riverine highway: American shad, blueback herring, Atlantic sturgeon, shortnose sturgeon, striped bass, American eel, sea lamprey, rainbow smelt and the mighty Atlantic salmon. All of these

fish lost a great portion of their spawning grounds. The dam ended all that and over the years the stocks of anadromous fish declined, fisheries dried up and many of the subsistence lifestyles were traded in for factory jobs. And that is just the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. All these fish did not live in a vacuum. They were part of a living,



*Turbine mortality kills not only eels but alewives and other fish.
Photo: Maine Department of Marine Resources*

breathing ecology, a huge biological machine, integrating both marine and freshwater ecosystems, allowing an exchange of nutrients across not just anadromous species, but nearly every living organism in the Gulf of Maine and waters attached to it. From great whales to herons to river otters to tiny planktons, all had been touched by the life of the alewife. Life went on for the colonists but the river died. The river that once supported millions upon millions of migratory fish now became a sewer line for its factories and towns.

In 1999 the Edwards dam in Augusta came out—the culmination of 20 years of work and negotiation. The installation of multiple fish passage facilities further upriver on both the main-stem Kennebec and the

Sebasticook Rivers opened up thousands of acres of riverine and ponded habitat essential to these stocks of fish. In reality, what can be said for the fish not living in a vacuum can also be said for the people of Maine. These fish are essential for our health as well. They are “canaries in a coal mine,” indicators of our environments health. We've been

working at river restoration in central Maine for twenty odd years now. We have seen great successes and thankfully few failures. Most of our efforts have been directed at one river system, the Kennebec—the mighty Kennebec, its head in the upland mountains and lakes of Maine and its feet dangling in the cool saltwater. It is but one of many rivers in the state suffering the same fate and on the cusp of what many of us hope will be a brighter future.

So I stood on the bank of the stream and waited for the demure alewives to tentatively sniff out their home. I was not alone. A great blue heron was waiting too.

Nate Gray

Duck Finds Her Way

Duck was in a panic. It was opening day of hunting season on Merrymeeting Bay, and the place sounded like a war zone. Shotguns popping off everywhere. Duck's whole tribe had been awoken before dawn by two hunters sculling their gunning float right through the bird's sleeping quarters, and they'd been on the run ever since.

Visibility was lousy – blowing rain and fog – and Duck lost her position in the flock, then she'd fallen way behind out of exhaustion. Every time the flight leaders thought they'd found a safe haven full of resting ducks, and the flock followed them in, it was another set of decoys. Up jumped hunters in their camouflaged floats, and the air was full of screaming birdshot.

Duck had seen dozens of her kinfolk fall, and after the flight leaders were gunned down thing went from bad to worse. In the confusion at the last landing, somewhere along the Muddy River, Duck had lost sight of her partner. Then a blast of shot sent her reeling, with a sharp pain in her breast. She tried to keep up with the other escaping birds, but she fell farther and farther behind. Now she was gliding into a tiny pocket of water in the middle of the marsh grasses. She had barely enough strength left to beat her wings. If there were hunters or dogs here, she was a goner.

But Duck was in luck. This pothole was too small to attract many ducks, so it was unguarded. Duck made an awkward belly-flop landing, paddled frantically into a tiny side channel and floated there, shaken and confused. Then she put her head under her wing, and sobbed.

It wasn't supposed to be like this. The tales she'd heard about the Bay painted a picture of a travelers' paradise. It was called Merrymeeting Bay. What could be nicer than that? A place where thousands upon thousands of migrant waterfowl could put down together. Way back it had been called Quabacook, which everyone said meant "Duck Water Place." Didn't that sound inviting? Sure there were tales of hunters, but what autumn watering hold didn't have some shadowy figure in cammy hiding in

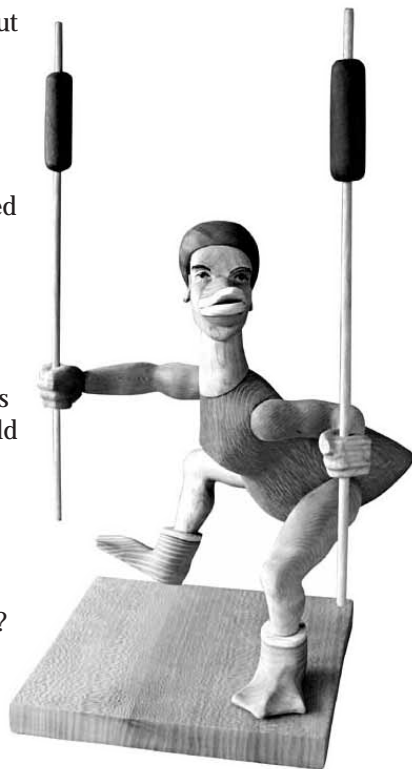


Photo & sculpture: Bryce Muir

the bulrushes? This Bay was supposed to be so vast, and frequented by so many birds, that the odds of getting shot were no worse than any other perils of cross-continental flying.

The Bay and estuary sure seemed like duck heaven when her lot came winging in a couple weeks back. Spread out below the flock was acre after acre of wild rice, casting their ripe fruit on the waters. Serpentine watercourses, covered with a rich brew of floating invertebrates, wove through the marsh grasses. A host of rare plants were scattered here and there, offering special treats, or merely the joy of variety. Pickerel weed and water parsnip, estuary marigold and spongy arrowhead, Long's bittercress and water pimpernel, Piper's pipewort and pygmyweed. The flock Medicine Bird was ecstatic about the curative qualities of Quabacook cuisine. The Duck Witch raved about the healing aspects of tapegrass, which grew here in the deep channels. She said it could bind up and heal any wound. It all looked good to Duck.

The weary travelers headed south from their nesting grounds in Canada had been glad for the respite. A chance to bulk up for the next leg. Some ducks were headed to Florida and the Gulf Coast, while other flight leaders had their internal navigation calibrated on winter wetlands in Central America. But for now this oasis where the rivers meet the tide was a Merrymeeting Bay, for sure.

Duck and her Drake, along with their flock, had taken a special liking to the floating fields of manna at the mouth of the Cathance. They'd dabbled and ducked day after day, skimming the surface for floaters and nibbling at the submerged treats. Each pair of birds might forage away from the main group while the Sun was high, but all the birds would congregate in the evening. Then the whole flock, hundreds in number, might jump and wheel about in an aerial ballet, before setting down together in open water.

Duck was particularly popular in the flock. She'd always been class clown, even as a giddy young duckling. Now she had a well developed comic routine, and her mate this year was the perfect straight drake.

When the whole fleet of ducks were floating together on the Bay, Duck would begin bantering with Drake – about suggestive tail-feathers or the way some ducks wiggled. Duck was a gifted mimic, and her send-ups of the flock elders always got the other ducks giggling. First one of the adolescents would titter-quack, then another. Pretty soon the entire fleet would be guffawing in hilarity. On a still evening it sounded like the whole bay was a comedy club having hysterics. Quack quack quack. Quack quack quack.

If the tide was out, and the flock gathered near some exposed flats, Duck would do her goose dance routine, which invariably broke up the whole tribe. She'd slap her big feet on the wet

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Duck Finds Her Way

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flats, stick her neck in and out, and stagger around like a goose who's been into the fermented rice, gabbling incoherently in goose-talk. Her flockmates would scream with laughter, and some of the younger ducks would have to be dunked to calm them.

Yes, it had been a splendid layover. Until today.

Now Duck was hiding in the rushes, in fear for her life. Drake was gone, maybe dead, and the rest of her flock had fled who knows where. And she had a burning wound in her chest. Duck dragged herself out onto a tussock of marsh grass, fluffed out her feathers for camouflage, buried her head under a wing, and fell into an exhausted sleep. It was still blowing rain and fog, but the water ran right off Duck's back.

Duck drifted into dreamland. Duck's dreams were disturbed by intermittent gunfire, and the intrusion of images from today's waking nightmare, but she sank deeper and deeper into the inner realms.

In dreams Duck was diving into a great well whose walls were waving curtains of lush green vegetation. The plants glowed with soft phosphorescence in a welter of verdant shades. When Duck's wings brushed them the curtains would brighten, and send pinwheels of sparks into the water.

In this dream Duck knew she was seeking something, but she seem to have forgotten what. And she was nervous. Now, when Duck is anxious she quacks a little nonsense song. Duck quacked quietly to herself.

Then what sounded like a whole chorus of ducks commenced to echo Duck's song. Her ears rang with the tuneless gabbling. Duck turned red with embarrassment, and stopped quacking. So did the chorus. The silence made Duck more nervous, and she began to sing again. Duck quacked quietly to herself.

Down and down Duck dove until she arrived at the bottom of the well. There the bottom was covered with a shimmering carpet of iridescent weed. It was tapegrass. Duck remembered what the Duck Witch had said, and knew this is what she was seeking. Duck feasted on the healing herb. She felt a tingling in her chest, and the pain eased. Duck quacked quietly to herself.

Then the water started to whirl, spinning Duck round and round until she was dizzy and disoriented. She didn't know right from left, or up from down, and the luminous vegetation streamed past her, dazzling her eyes. Duck quacked quietly to herself.

Now the chorus was quacking her song again, but she seemed to hear snatches of sentences in the gabble. Duck knew it was only an echo of her own silly song, so it couldn't make sense, but there was still some kind of coherence in the choral reflection. As though a thousand ducks were quacking nonsense and it sounded like Shakespeare. Duck quacked quietly to herself.

The spinning phosphorescence around Duck took on the look of a fluid kaleidoscope. All the shades of green fragmented and recombined into crystalline symmetries. The whole dizzy universe of Duck's dream turned into a 3-dimensional mandala. Duck was at the center, but she was also somewhere off to the side, where she could see the whole fantastic fragmented flower. Duck quacked quietly to herself.

From her separate vantage Duck saw the spinning mandala was wheeling around a pulsing brightness in the middle of her chest. And now she understood what the chorus was singing, even though it was cloaked in nonsense. In her inner ear Duck heard the voice calling: "Dig it out. Spit it out."

Duck bent her head down, dug at the birdshot lodged in her breast with the hooked tip of her bill. The kaleidoscope spun faster and faster. Duck had the shot in her mouth. She spat it out. And the colors changed. Now all the colors of the rainbow circled around Duck. Her world still wheeled, but a feeling of well-being radiated out from the mending wound in her breast. Duck quacked quietly to herself.

Duck heard the voice in the chorus more clearly now.

"Do not fear," it said. "You are the one who can travel far and always return. You are the one who can pass through water and air, and still find the way home."

This sounded reassuring to Duck, but the world was still spinning wildly, and she still didn't know up from down. Duck quacked quietly to herself.

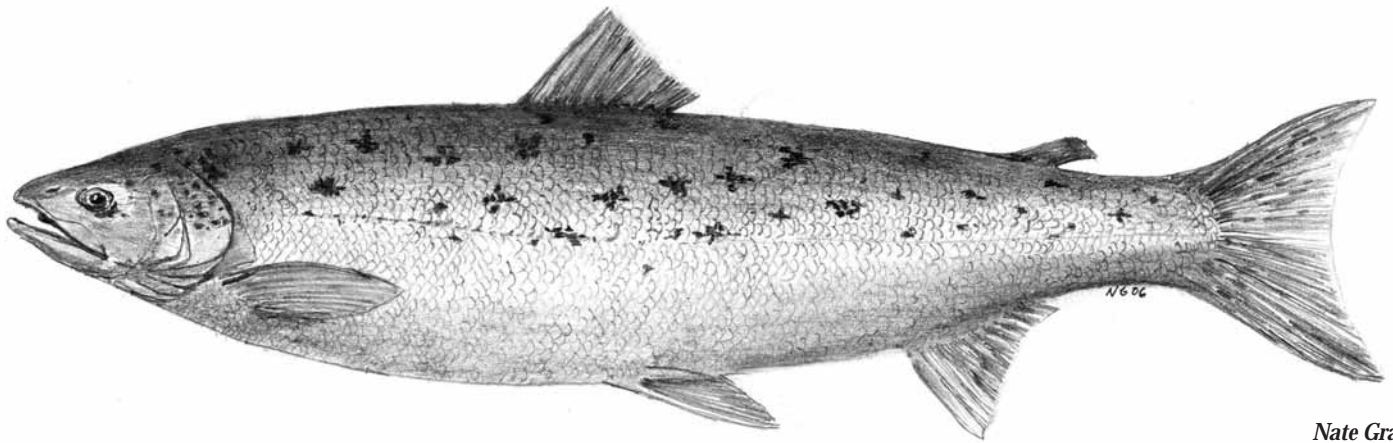
As if hearing her thoughts, the voice spoke again.

"If you aim for the Sky, you will find your way," it said.

As if compelled, Duck bent her head back, lifting her bill. Instantly she was rocketing forward? Upward? The curtains of light streamed past her, and the chorus sounded like a thousand ducks lifting off the Bay, wings beating like thunder. Duck quacked quietly to herself.

She exploded out of the fluid light and up, it was up, into the air – soaring like a missile. With a CLUNK the disembodied part of herself popped back into Duck, and her whole self stared down on the estuary spread below. It was still daytime down there, but the fog was breaking up. There were rents in the clouds, and a stiff northwest wind was ruffling the Bay. Duck's gaze could zoom in on the least detail, and she saw tattered flocks of ducks still beating from one false shelter to another. She could see the hunters and their floats distinctly, despite the cammy clothes and the cedar boughs disguising the boats. The whole map of the Sagadahoc imprinted on her mind's eye, with danger and safety clearly defined. And Duck saw the remnants of her own flock, huddle together along the Woolwich shore, just up the Kennebec from Chops. Duck quacked quietly to herself.

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Progress toward listing Kennebec River populations of Atlantic Salmon as Endangered

In November of 2000, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) declared a Gulf of Maine Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of anadromous Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) pursuant to the Endangered Species Act. USFWS and NMFS defined the Gulf of Maine DPS as including “all naturally reproducing wild populations and those river-specific hatchery populations of Atlantic salmon having historical river specific characteristics found north of and including tributaries of the lower Kennebec River to, but not including, the mouth of the St. Croix River at the U.S.–Canada border.”

Gulf of Maine and river specific populations were genetically defined in a report by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences. USFWS and NMFS further declared the Gulf of Maine DPS of anadromous Atlantic salmon to be an endangered species pursuant to the Endangered Species Act.

While the entire Gulf of Maine population appeared to be named as endangered, only salmon populations on eight smaller rivers beginning with the Sheepscot River and moving east were actually named to the list. Atlantic salmon on the Androscoggin, Kennebec and Penobscot Rivers were excluded.

In May of 2005, Friends of Merrymeeting Bay joined Douglas and Timothy Watts and the Maine Toxics Action Coalition in a citizen's petition to list the Kennebec population of Atlantic salmon as endangered. The next step should have been a review of our petition, followed by a decision, within 90 days (known as a “90-day finding”), about whether a full biological status review for the salmon

was warranted. In September of 2006 (without having issued a 90-day finding on our petition) NMFS went ahead and completed a full biological status review for Atlantic salmon in the U.S. The review concludes that the limited populations protected under the Endangered Species Act in 2000, should be expanded to include salmon in the Androscoggin, Kennebec, and Penobscot Rivers, as well as hatchery fish used in the recovery effort. Amusingly, the 90-day finding on our petition, which concluded that we presented enough scientific evidence to warrant a full status review, was released in November of 2006—after the status review had already been completed.

The biological status review was conducted by scientists from NMFS, USFWS, the Maine Atlantic Salmon Commission, and the Penobscot Nation. The document underwent independent peer review. A decision about including these additional populations in the listed DPS was deferred by the two agencies during the original listing, pending collection and analysis of additional genetic data. The status review details the results and conclusions of this research effort. Our petition provided further information and a much needed push. Whether NMFS will follow the recommendations of the status review and will recommend Endangered Species listing remains to be seen.

Both the full status review and 90-day finding may be found in the cybrary section of our web site at www.friendsofmerrymeetingbay.org. Our thanks to Doug Watts, primary petition author!

Ed Friedman

Duck Finds Her Way

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Then Duck was rocketing higher still. Way up into airless space. Now she looked down on the entire eastern seaboard. Duck could identify the whole route from her birthplace and nesting ground in Canada to her winter haunts on the Gulf. All the landmarks and navigational aids winked at her, aligned to the stars she now saw overhead. Then the Earth was just a huge blue and white ball, turning majestically below her. Duck quacked quietly to herself.

She heard her own voice speaking out of the silly song: "It's time to return. Head down."

Duck put her head down, and dove back into unconsciousness.

When she awoke in the marsh grass it was night time, and the sky was clear. The storm had passed. All the stars were out. And Duck felt fabulous. There was still a bit of tapegrass dangling from her bill, and she ate it with relish. Normally Duck would have stayed hidden during the night, but something told her she must find her flock in the dark, before the hunters came back. Duck jumped and flew across the Bay. She wasn't anxious any more, so she didn't have to sing her silly song.

Following the internal map she now carried, Duck flew straight to the remnants of her flock. They were milling about on the Kennebec, still in a state of panic. Confused and leaderless. Duck landed in the middle of the tribe and began calling in a loud voice.

"Lost ducks to me! Lost ducks to me!"

The other birds responded to the voice of authority. All the leaders had been shot, and even those birds who thought Duck was nothing but a slapstick prankster were willing to listen to anyone who seemed to know their way. Even Drake, who was very glad to see her, realized something had changed in her. She was no longer just a loveable clown.

When the other birds had all come to order around Duck, she spoke reassuringly. She told them it was time to fly south. They were well fed, and although they had lost their old leaders, she knew the way, and would show others the marks. But they must lift off right now, even if there were relatives out there hiding in the night. The hunters would be back again before daylight. It was time to go.

There were some squabblers, a few quackings about "that clown," especially from those hoping to find relatives tomorrow. Some birds refused to take off, out of loyalty to the missing, but most of the ducks were glad to have Duck lead them away. She nominated a score of the strongest fliers as deputy flight leaders. Together they marshaled the flock. With a single quack the whole fleet jumped into the air, and thundered into the darkness. Duck was in the lead, steering by the stars.

Which is why Duck sometimes quacks to herself. And why you must listen to the voices within, no matter how silly they sound.

Bryce Muir

Fall Bay Day '06

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Water Association, Mina Jellison, Steve Eagles, Anne Hammond, Ruth Deike, Jay Robbins, Lee Cranmer and Bill Burgess of Maine Historic Preservation Commission, Erin Crowley of Maine Department of Environmental Protection, Nate Gray and Jason Bartlett of Maine Department of Marine Resources, Will Zell, Martha Spiess, Wild Oats Bakery, Morning Glory Natural Foods, Sarah Wolpow, Ed Friedman, Jim Connolly of Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and the participating schools. For more information about our educational programs or to get involved, please contact Grace Cooney at 729-4650 or Grace@FriendsOfMerrymeetingBay.org

Grace Cooney



A glass eel asks why?

Photo: Watts Brothers

Eel Update

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay is a step closer to our full Board of Environmental Protection (BEP) public hearing on immediate safe and effective eel and anadromous fish passage at the four lowest Kennebec River dams. The hearing date, probably February or March, should be set after a December 7, BEP meeting. Still, things continue to go badly with this Board, hand-picked by our governor. Most recently they refused to hear our second petition on the Androscoggin River dams pending court resolution of an appeal Doug Watts filed for their arbitrary and capricious decision to dismiss his initial Androscoggin petition. The Board Chair made a unilateral decision to hold our second petition in abeyance. The problem is that statute says the entire Board must make a decision within 30 days of filing to move forward or dismiss. We appealed the Chair's decision and the Board backed him up.

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

Please take a moment to sign and mail the enclosed postcard to the Governor! Then, contact Ed (666-3372; edfomb@gwi.net) or Sarah (721-0941; fomb@gwi.net) to let us know you have sent it.

Thank you!
Ed Friedman

Thank You Dee!

In October, Dee Cummins of Richmond retired from the FOMB Steering Committee after five years of service. I met Dee years ago at the Augusta Civic Center during a public hearing on a proposed bill that, in an effort to eliminate dioxin discharges and reduce water use, would have required Maine pulp mills to move to a totally chlorine-free (TCF) bleaching process. While our legislation did not pass, it framed the debate for the ultimate passage of a bill that eliminated the use of elemental chlorine (ECF) in favor of chlorine dioxide that has reduced dioxin discharges.

Dee has spent many hours at the State House covering issues and testifying for the National Association of Social Workers. Her strong interest and background (MSW, LCSW, & RN) in public health, mental health and toxics is something she brought to both our Steering Committee and Research and Advocacy subcommittee when, in 2001, she and her husband Clancy came aboard. Dee also has been active on the Richmond Conservation Committee and with local historical societies. A loyal and outspoken Steering Committee member, Dee persevered through many tough board issues as the pain in her knees increased to the point where she has now stepped down.

Now, one recent new knee later, she is working hard at physical therapy to better help kick the proverbial rascals out.

Your contributions will be greatly missed. Thanks and good health to you Dee!

Ed Friedman

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- 45 Page St. Brunswick ME, 04011

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- Brunswick

Thank you to Tom and Martha Mitchell for designing this issue of The MMNews & to all our contributing writers.



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

MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

- \$_____ Other.
- \$20 Smelt
- \$50 Alewife
- \$100 Shad
- \$250 Striped Bass
- \$500 Wild Salmon
- \$1,000+Sturgeon

Name

RR# or Street Address

Town /State/Zip

Phone

Email

- \$7.00 enclosed for a copy of Conservation Options: A Guide for Maine Landowners. (\$5 for the book, \$2 for postage)

- Renewal
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- Please send me information about volunteer opportunities

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Congratulations, Brunswick!!

Brunswick voters have spoken in favor of Brunswick's Ballot Question 1 and protecting children & the environment from exposure to pesticides and sewer sludge products.

Saturday's ballot inspection (recount) showed the Brunswick Community Health and Land Care Ordinance passing by six votes—one vote more than Election Day results. Thanks to the hard work of Brunswick's Town Clerk, every ballot was hand-counted during the day-long process—so both sides can have confidence that all votes were counted correctly and the voice of the people has been heard.

It's very exciting that Brunswick citizens have voted to pass this program and that we as a community can avoid exposing children, other parks visitors and our drinking water supplies to the risks associated with pesticides and sewer sludges, while cultivating healthy & robust playing turf.

We wish to thank you all for your belief in this effort and your support. We wish to also thank opponents and hope that we can all move forward together. The next step is working with the town to develop a steering committee to guide the implementation process. We look forward to this and welcome your input and invite you to join in. Thank you, Brunswick!!

*Tom Fusco
Laura Moon*