



Friends of Merrymeeting Bay (FOMB) 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

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.

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SMELTING ON MERRYMEETING BAY

What observations would Herman Melville, the great bard of the whaling industry, make about smelts, a variety of fish so modest in size that the limits Maine imposes upon anglers are a matter of quarts, not inches?

Smelt fishing is a deep and dependable tradition on the state's coast. As soon as the ice is thick enough, smelters drag their customized shanties onto the tidal rivers and sit inside them, stoking wood stoves and tending to baited lines that hang through holes in the ice. Every December, whole villages of such smelt shanties spring up almost overnight here — an official, if unnecessary, signal of winter's arrival.

What would Melville, the author of "Moby-Dick" so often bemused by human stubbornness and captivated by specialized techniques, have thought of Maine's curious smelt-fishing scene? To answer these questions, I recently joined several smelt-fishing expeditions on the Cathance River with two Melville-admiring smelt experts: Franklin Burroughs and Peter Coviello, literature professors who became smelting mates while teaching at nearby Bowdoin College. Their wives came along for the first of the smelting sessions, a four-hour nighttime outing that produced only a single five-inch smelt. Not exactly the stuff of epic novels, but the beer and pizza were very nice.

Both professors agreed that Melville would have celebrated the communal warmth of the smelt shanty, where, as with a whaling vessel, the cozy proximity of friends creates a spiritual bulwark against the harsh elements of the indifferent natural world.



Photo: Ed Friedman

"Melville would have enjoyed the matey-ness and conviviality," said Coviello, who specializes in 19th-century American literature. "Also, I bet something about the often outsized effort expended to haul in these really very small creatures would have appealed to his sense, not infrequently comic, of scale."

The Cathance is a tidal tributary of Merrymeeting Bay, a prime spot of smelting territory about an hour's drive up the coast from Portland. The area is home to several smelting camps, where out-of-towners can rent a shanty for a full swing of the tide. For our second session, we made a morning reservation at River Bend, where a session costs \$15 a person and includes bait and firewood. Burroughs, who lives nearby, brought his family members who were in town for the holiday. Smelt shanties are a great place for children, he said, describing the successful birthday parties one of his daughters had at a smelt shanty when she was a child.

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SMELTING ON MERRYMEETING BAY (CONTINUED)

The typical Maine smelt shanty has a rough wooden floor, a wood stove and several chairs. Along two walls are long gaps in the ice, slashed out with a chain saw. Above these troughs hang a series of lines, attached to pegs near the ceiling, so an angler could potentially sink dozens of hooks at once, each baited with a segment of bloodworm. Optional accouterments might include a bottle of whiskey and an electric frying pan. In one shanty we visited, the pegs suspending the lines were mounted on a pole that was hanging from springs. Just by moving the pole, we could efficiently jiggle all the bait to entice fish that were not biting. The springs, Burroughs pointed out, were designed for screen doors. Such unfussy resourcefulness, he said, exemplifies the spirit of rural Maine.

“Maine is especially about the art of making do, maximal ingenuity deployed against minimal opportunity,” he said. “The materials of its construction and furnishing are recycled, scavenged and cobbled together with an almost ostentatious scorn of ostentation; nothing is unnecessary and nothing is superfluous.” Burroughs has written about smelt fishing and other outdoor traditions in “Confluence: Merrymeeting Bay,” a collection of ecological history essays.



Smelting trips have solidified his friendship with Coviello, who at 36 is three decades younger and comes from the opposite end of the city-country mouse spectrum. While Burroughs, 65, is a committed duck hunter and naturalist, Coviello candidly admits to fearing wilderness (“My respect for nature,” he said, “is predicated on the harm it wants to do to me.”). But in smelting, Coviello said, he has found an outdoorsy pursuit perfectly matched to his urban sensibilities.

“Rarely are you distracted from the drinking and the talking by the actual need to catch fish,” he said. “It’s an occasion for high sociability — and it’s not like there are so many of them in Maine — masked cleverly as a kind of sport.”

Jan and Ashby Hayward enjoy an increasingly rare Bay pursuit of Abbagadasset Point and Leighton Smelt Camps (below) Photos: Ed Friedman

The arrival of a school of smelt is announced when the lines begin trembling and weaving through the troughs. The size of one’s dinner party is then simply a function of how quickly one can yank the fish up and replace the bait. Within an hour, we had enough smelt to feed three people and two cats. At one point, Coviello even managed to snare two smelt on one line.

“Call me Ishmael,” he said, triumphantly.

Nathaniel Vinton

This essay was originally published in the New York Times 12/26/07 and is reprinted here with permission of the author.



FRIENDS OF MERRYMEETING BAY 2016 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Media

Print & TV: (Over 20-US & Canada) GMO Atlantic salmon, Outings, Brunswick Fish Kill, Presumpscot River CWA, Education, Speaker Series

Volunteers

Approximately 3802 volunteer hours (475.25)
120 volunteers

Membership

425 households
Speaker Series – (290 people)
Outside 2016 (Paddle Series & Walks – 111 people.
Newsletters – 4

Grants

\$10,000- Staffing

Outreach Presentations

Maine Maritime Museum Cruises & Paddles (80 participants)

Education

Two Bay Days (325) students) 7 schools
School Visits (76 visits, 1976 students, 46 teachers, 16 schools)
Non-School Visits (300 people)
Web site updates

Conservation and Stewardship

Additional easements in progress
Continuous landowner outreach
Ongoing stewardship activities
Monitor all easement & fee properties

Research

Water Quality Monitoring – 21 sites
Carp Tagging Study

Advocacy (postings, letters, testimony, etc.)

Lawsuit-GMO Atlantic salmon
FERC fish kill reporting
Healthy Rivers/Healthy Gulf promoting safe fish passage
Smart Meters
Topsham plastic bag referendum
Posting Fish Consumption Advisories
Presumpscot R. CWA-FERC & agency comments

Primary Partners

Friends of Casco Bay
The Archaeological Conservancy
Kennebec Reborn
Avian Haven
Maine Coalition to Stop Smart Meters
Bowdoin College Environmental Studies
Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
Maine Maritime Museum
Department of Marine Resources
Bowdoinham Public Library
Maine Land Trust Network
Friends of Sebago Lake
Department of Environmental Protection
Patagonia Outlet, Freeport
Chops Point School
Brunswick TV 3

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

We started this year off with a bang due to our longtime Atlantic salmon restoration efforts in the Bay and Gulf of Maine. Earthjustice, with whom we worked to reopen the St. Croix River to alewives, asked FOMB to join a broad coalition of environmental, consumer, and commercial and recreational fishing organizations in suing the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA for approving the first-ever genetically engineered (GE) food animal, an Atlantic salmon engineered to grow quickly. The man-made salmon was created by AquaBounty Technologies, Inc. with DNA from three fish: Atlantic salmon, Pacific king salmon, and Arctic ocean eelpout. This marks the first time any government in the world has approved a GE animal for commercial sale and consumption.

The plaintiff coalition, jointly represented by legal counsel from Center for Food Safety and Earthjustice, includes Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, Institute for Fisheries Resources, Golden Gate Salmon Association, Kennebec Reborn, Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, Ecology Action Centre, Food & Water Watch, Center for Biological Diversity, Friends of the Earth, Cascadia Wildlands, and Center for Food Safety.

In approving the GE salmon, FDA determined it would not require labeling of the GE fish to let consumers know what they are buying; which led Congress to call for labeling in the 2016 omnibus spending bill. FDA's approval also ignored comments from nearly 2 million people opposed to the approval because the agency failed to analyze and prevent the risks to wild salmon and the environment, as well as fishing communities, including the risk that GE salmon could escape and threaten endangered wild salmon stocks.

Back in 2008 we partnered with Friends of Sebago Lake (FOSL) to halt a proposed plan for removal of the Cumberland Mills non-hydro dam on the Presumpscot River. In exchange for removal SAAPI, the South African dam owner, would be relieved of fish passage installation at many of their upstream dams for close to 40 years. There are 8 dams on the 24 mile Presumpscot blocking passage to Sebago.. Instead we supported use of an existing statute calling for a non-hydro fishway proceeding that DMR and IF&W Commissioners could utilize to mandate passage. Ultimately this happened and fish passed without encumbering upstream dams. With effective passage at all Presumpscot dams, river herring, and other species, could gain the lake in a day or two.

Fast forward to 2016 and a similar poorly hatched plan for the Saccarappa hydro dam in Westbrook is afoot by two conservation groups, USFWS, DMR and the City of Westbrook. SAAPI was just granted their third fish passage extension, inextricably tied to a settlement agreement between the parties mentioned. The settlement provides another extension to SAAPI, robust



Sebago Lake: Inaccessible habitat

Photo: Point of View Helicopter Services

post-dam removal fish passage facilities and a whitewater park in exchange for tossing fish passage at two critical upstream dams between Westbrook and Sebago, under the bus. The agreement, as we see it, not only sacrifices fish passage to 50-67% of their native habitat but also violates the Clean Water Act (CWA). FOMB and FOSL have intervened in this matter both at the Board of Environmental Protection and Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). This defective agreement basically allows the CWA to be discarded when inconvenient, involvement.

Late in the fall FOMB Androscoggin water quality monitor volunteer Becky Bowes reported a massive kill of juvenile river herring in Brunswick. Currently in Brunswick when water is not passing over the damn face, the

only non-turbine downstream passage is through an 18” hole seen in the banner photo next to the turbine bays. Meanwhile on the Union River in Ellsworth, Brookfield is also actively killing fish while our ally the Downeast Salmon Federation works to hold them accountable.

FOMB water monitors again kept tabs on sites around the Bay and its tributaries ascending the Kennebec and Androscoggin as far as Gardiner and Durham respectively. Despite exceptionally warm conditions and record high temperatures class B conditions continued to be met, for the most part, on the two major rivers where volunteers test for dissolved oxygen (DO), pH and E. coli bacteria. These conditions did, however, cause a fish kill on the Kennebec as large river herring populations migrating upstream used up scarce DO while the dam owners, husbanding their waters for dry weather, exacerbated the problem by reduced releases, cutting back on flows that would add more oxygen.



Brookfield Energy's Brunswick Androscoggin Dam, Kills Fish Photo: Ed Friedman

Our education program continues to be quite active reaching approximately 2,000 students in 2016 through in-school visits and stimulating 325 fourth and fifth graders at our two Bay Days. As many people realize, hands on education has taken a back seat to technology-driven learning in the schools. What most people don't realize is; over-use of electronic devices, if wireless, can be quite harmful and possibly carcinogenic. In May, the National Toxicology Program, part of the NIH, released partial results of their 25 million dollar study looking at whole body exposure to rats of low level radiofrequency radiation of the type emitted by cell phones, smart meters and wifi devices. 8.3% of male rats developed brain or heart cancers. The rest of the study, including effects on mice is supposed to be released by the end of 2017.

We continue to actively protect land around the Bay and 2016 saw a wonderful 186 acre piece between the Kennebec and Abbagadasset rivers receive permanent protection due to our efforts and those of a number of partners including Maine Farmland Trust, Kennebec Estuary Land Trust, Maine Coast Heritage Trust and MDIF&W. We have another two parcels in progress for conservation easements and a probable third on the horizon for protection. All easements are monitored yearly and registered with the State.

A few years ago we radio tagged a dozen carp, two from each tributary. Tracking efforts were not as comprehensive as hoped but we learned there are no apparent substantive winter aggregations, as are present in other smaller water bodies. We also know a number of fish either suffered mortality or their implanted transmitters fell out since their signals remain stationary. As of early winter, only an Abbagadasset fish was showing recent movement. That fish has now gone quiet which may just mean it is out of range of the several vehicle access points for our receivers.

All in all, thanks to member support and our incredible volunteers and partners, we had some notable accomplishments this year. I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome several new Steering Committee members and thank our existing Board as well as Kathleen McGee, standing in as temporary Executive Coordinator. Elsewhere in this issue you will see our advertisement for an Executive Director. Please pass this information on to any qualified and passionate person you think could be interested in carrying on our work!

Respectfully Submitted,

Ed Friedman, Chair

WELCOME TO OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Rebecca (Becky) Bowes moved with her husband Alan to Brunswick four years ago. She became acquainted with Merrymeeting Bay when they moved into a house on the Androscoggin and believes it's essential to protect this unique and special place. Becky has helped with water sampling and data entry for FOMB for the last two years and is looking forward to working on membership and fundraising while on the board. Becky is a technical writer at IDEXX.

Simon Beirne has worked for the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, the Maine Public Utilities Commission, and the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department. More than a decade ago, he also worked as FOMB's second intern. Having earned degrees in law, Environmental Sustainability, and Earth Sciences, Simon has developed a holistic lens with which to view a complex array of factors affecting relationships among ecological, economic, and social environments. His M.Sc. dissertation (available on the FOMB website's Cybrary), supervised by FOMB's Ed Friedman, analyzes the removal of Edwards Dam from the Kennebec River. Examining this topic was meaningful to Simon because his lifelong home (i.e., where he was raised) is on Merrymeeting Bay. He has spent countless days exploring the Bay and its six tributaries. To a great extent, this region of Maine has defined who Simon is today. He currently practices law in Augusta. Simon has joined our Conservation and Stewardship Committee.



Simon deploys current study buoy at the Chops 2005

Phil Brzozowski lives with his wife Judy Schuppen along the Eastern River in Pittston. A former MOFGA Board member, Phil has been active in the MOFGA Sagadahoc Chapter since its inception. He and Judy are longtime FOMB members. Now, recently retired from his role as a computer programmer for the State, Phil hopes to put more time into playing music and working on FOMB's Board with his focus in the Research & Advocacy Committee.

SPEED OF THE SALMON (A BIT OF MAINE HISTORY-COURTESY OF ROGER WHEELER, FRIENDS OF SEBAGO LAKE)

Just how fast salmon can travel has never been proved. Owners of weirs say that a healthy salmon can swim faster than a torpedo boat. Here is some evidence on the subject:

Frank Arcy of Winterport, Me., went fishing the other day at the pool below Bangor Dam. He landed two small salmon on the flood tide. About 11:30 a.m. he struck a big one, which caused his rod to bend until it was perilously near the breaking point. Then the salmon darted under the boat, and catching the line against the keel, severed the fly and leader from the silk string and escaped.

Disgusted with his luck, the young man landed and went to Bangor at 11:40, remaining in the city until the afternoon train took him home. His father met him at the station saying: "I have got your fly and leader all right, Frank. I found them in the jaw of a twenty-six pound salmon which I took from the weir at high tide today. It was just 12:10 when I dipped the fish from the weir into my punt. What time did you lose your rig?"

On comparing watches, father and son learned that the fish had gone from a mile above Bangor to Bucksport Center, a distance of thirteen miles, inside of half an hour. After making due allowance for every condition, it was proved that the salmon had covered the distance at the rate of about twenty eight miles an hour.

Attica Daily Ledger, August 18, 1904, page 7. Reprinted from the New York Sun

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 Kathleen McGee. We always welcome member input and we'd love for you to join us!

Steering Committee

- Ed Friedman, Chair (Bowdoinham)
- Nate Gray, Treasurer (Freeport)
- Tom Walling, Secretary (Bowdoinham)
- Simon Beirne (Bowdoinham)
- Becky Bowes (Brunswick)
- Phil Brzozowski (Pittston)
- Steve Musica (Richmond)

Education Committee

- Betsy Steen, Co-Chair, 666-3468
- Tom Walling, Co-Chair, 666-5837

Conservation and Stewardship Committee

Chair Vacancy

Membership and Fundraising Committee

Nate Gray, Chair, 446-8870

Research and Advocacy Committee

Ed Friedman, Chair, 666-3372

Coordinator/Organizer

Kathleen McGee, 666-1118

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

- Renewal
- New Member
- Send information about volunteer opportunities
- I would like a sticker

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



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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay seeks an Executive Director; a passionate activist, with deep love of this place to take our group into the future. FOMB is the only organization in Maine taking a holistic approach to environmental work; mixing research, advocacy, education and land conservation. We are an active, membership-driven grassroots non-profit dedicated to the preservation, protection, and enhancement of this unique ecosystem and those relating to it. Full-time position. Salary (\$33-49K range) commensurate with experience. EOE.

Application instructions and complete
job description at **www.fomb.org**