

The Merrymeeting News



Spring 2007 VOLUME XVII, No. 2

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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Kerry Hardy

Greetings from our New Executive Coordinator/Organizer

I first came to Maine on a bicycle trip in 1997. I was just passing through, but when my bicycle broke I figured I would stay for a little bit. Ten years later I am more in love than ever with Maine and its people. When I made the decision to call Maine home I made the commitment to myself to do my part to contribute to the community of my ideals. I had no idea at the time that I would take that goal to perhaps one of its furthest possible conclusions and end up representing part of Portland in the Maine Legislature.

Growing up, as a kid in Brooklyn, New York, Maine had always been a pristine place of legend on the farthest reaches of the map and my imagination. I came here searching for the Maine of Helen and Scott Nearing and I found it but I soon realized I could not escape the development pressures and environmental degradation that seemed to follow me everywhere I went in my travels around the country.

What the Maine ethos taught me is that if you want to change something you've got to do it yourself. I began by fumbling around with some fellow concerned citizens in Portland to try our hand at attacking some local toxics issues. Since then I have had the very rewarding and addictive experience of seeing a ragtag bunch of regular citizens mount successful campaigns not just once but many times over.

I have met some wonderful people through my grassroots activism and I learned a few things in organizing grassroots citizens groups. I've learned especially that nothing is possible without the contribution of each individual who decides to take responsibility for their community, their world. My own experiences have given credence to what Margaret Mead said about the potential of a small group of thoughtful people to change the world. I have enjoyed working with diverse groups of people, each with their unique talents to offer. I have thrilled at watching wallflowers become warriors for positive change.

If I possess any talent, it must be the good fortune to always stumble upon quality people on my life's journey. Now I am humbled and fortunate yet again with this opportunity to be in service to the inspiring group of people that make up Friends of Merrymeeting Bay. I am simply in awe of the people of FOMB that I have met so far. It's dizzying how much this FOMB community accomplishes so effectively with so few resources. I feel privileged to have the chance to be of some use to you in your extraordinary efforts to protect this ecological gem, Merrymeeting Bay. It's hard to imagine what you are all doing could be improved upon yet I welcome the challenge to avail myself to you in the effort to make FOMB an even more effective force for protecting the Bay.

As a legislator, I used a customer service approach to reach out and engage citizens. It was always my aim to extend to my constituents the tools they needed to get involved in their government and make it work for them. I will use this approach in my service to you, the members of FOMB. I know your lives are very busy and your free time with family and friends is a precious commodity. I also respect that

continued on page 7

Robin Comes Around

It was full Spring and most of the raw times were past. Eagle was spiraling up the mid-day thermals, and Woodpecker was rapping the trees for bugs. Migrants were passing through, skeins of geese honking across the Bay, flocks of blackbirds and grackles chattered and twittered as they whirled and lit, hopped and foraged, then jumped and whirled again. Tom Turkey was beating his breast and fanning his tail. Woodcock was whistling his wings at the girls, as he swooped and meeped. Cardinal and Oreole were flashing their colors. The doves were cooing. It was a busy time.

Robin ignored all the Spring hoopla. He'd been one of the few birds to winter-over by the Cathance. When all the other robins had flocked and flitted off to warm and sunny places, Robin had eschewed the enticements of winter worms and abundant bugs. He'd teamed up with a cadre of local heavies and spent the frozen months living off rose hips and choke cherries and the like. Come Spring Robin was a leaner bird, but still fat and sassy compared to the wrung-out red-breasts now trooping in. But Robin was unmoved by all the green and budding excitement.

Not that he wasn't stirred by the worm rise. What robin wouldn't feel his toes tingle when the fat ones began to poke up? But it was all sort of old hat. Robin had hopped and fluttered over the same acreage all year. He knew where the best sheltering cedars hid in their dells, and which patch of meadow would be the first to thaw. Robin was unimpressed that the other natives were out puttering in their shirtsleeves on sunny afternoons, and the River Rats were busy mending their boats. Truth to tell, Robin still had a bit of the winter blues. Yeah, yeah – it was Spring again – but what was the point of it all?

“Why bother?” Robin muttered.

Robin began to show a bit of interest when the frost went out of the neighbors' garden plots and the avid gardeners started spading up their beds. There certainly were some juicy nightcrawlers in that fertile loam. But even a hearty feed didn't assuage Robin's Weltschmerz.

“Why bother?” Robin muttered.

Robin went through the motions, however. Hop and spy. Hop and spy. Grab and gobble. Robin flew around his bounds, marking a territory full of good feed, good shelter, good promise of summer lodging. But he was just too jaded to care.

“Why bother?” muttered Robin.

The noisy jollity of the migrant birds was a constant irritant to Robin. The gabble of passing ducks, all the outlandish calls of arriviste songbirds, even the new spring tunes of his winter

compatriots, the chickadees, galled him. Robin tried to tune out the happy cacophony, but everyone insisted on harping on. “Spring! Spring!” Gaah.

“Why bother?” Robin muttered.

Now Robins flock up to travel, or for mutual protection in the winter, and Robin had ganged up with the local crowd when the snow flew. Half a dozen fat red-breasts had spent the season hanging together, and they'd worn out every topic of conversation. If Robin never nattered with another bird it might be too soon. He'd had words with the Pigeons wintering under the Bowdoinham bridge, and told tales with the chattering Chickadees. He and his buds had discussed the damned Owls with their midnight wakeup hooting, the sneaky foxes, and how the winterberries tasted especially tart this winter. But now it was Spring dispersal time, and frankly, Robin was glad to be away from the constant jabbering. Robin kept to himself on his chosen turf.

“Why bother?” Robin muttered.

He couldn't get away from the exuberant invasion, though. Every day another flock of exalting exiles came winging in, and when the wind was southerly it was like Normandy Beach. Even if he really didn't care, Robin made sure the incoming males stayed clear of his domain. The last thing he wanted was company. Especially those young males with all their strut and bluster. Whenever a scrawny young red-breast would come hopping across his turf, Robin would fly out and harry the punk away. Even so, Robin wondered what possessed him.

“Why bother?” Robin muttered.

It was after a chilly two-day downpour, when the whole world steamed and glistened in the morning sunlight, that the last flock of migrant robins appeared on Robin's doorstep. Wet and bedraggled from a bruising ride on the storm, and wan with fasting, the new robins started greedily yanking half-drowned worms out of Robin's favorite patch. He couldn't summon the energy to dispute the territory with them.

“Why bother?” Robin muttered.

But he did hop out into the sunshine, just to make a showing. Plump and glowing with health, Robin was the image of elegance, his big red breast radiant. Even without defiance, his unhurried insouciance was rather intimidating to the new birds. They gave him plenty of berth. But one young female, still dizzy and disoriented by her exertions, and preoccupied with tugging on a huge nightcrawler, found herself cut off from the flock. Robin was hopping straight toward her.

My, he was a vision of masculine robinhood. It made her

shiver, and her tail feathers flicked open and closed, partly in fear, but partly in excitement. An excitement she didn't quite understand. Robin had intended to shoo-off this scrawny interloper who didn't give him room, but he, too, was having feelings he didn't understand. Robin hopped up to the dappled young bird, but found he was speechless.

She found her voice first.

"This is a lovely spot, is it yours?" she asked politely, with her head down, and her voice trembling. When he just stood there staring at her, she went on. "I especially like the flowers."

Robin looked around in confusion. Flowers? He hadn't noticed flowers. Now he saw there were, indeed, daffodils just opening, tulips and hydrangeas peeping, and the grass was all green and glistening after the rain.

"Uh, yes." Robin finally managed to peep gruffly. Robin meant to sound unfriendly and discourage this invasion, but he couldn't find the right tone. In fact, he couldn't find anything else to say. His emotions were in a turmoil.

The shy robin bowed her head, as though he had said something very intelligent, and remarked: "Your worms are ever so nice."

Robin was utterly flabbergasted. He knew he should chase off this worm-stealing vagabond, who dared compliment his worms, the ones she was eating. But he simply couldn't speak. His heart was in his throat. The white patches on her flicking tail, the way she fluttered her wings open, her dainty little hops – Robin was smitten.

Robin gasped, He shivered out his feathers, and hopped away from her as quick as he could. He tried to clear his head.

She thought, "What a nice big robin he is, and how kind not to chase me off."

For the rest of the day Robin stayed near the visitors and kept his eye on the young female. She hardly dared look at him, but whenever she glanced his way Robin straightened up involuntarily, and he'd strut a little. The other robins noticed all this, of course, and snickered among themselves, but Robin and the young female were oblivious to the chaffer.

That night the migrant flock camped out in Robin's maple trees, but he was too preoccupied with the strange emotions flooding him to notice the other birds – or bother to chase

them off. Robin stayed awake all night thinking about the shy young bird. By morning he realized he was terrified she would fly off with her flock and he might never see her again.

At cock-crow Robin was up preening himself, practicing little speeches in the window of the nearest house. Try as he might Robin couldn't find the right words. He didn't want to sound like an idiot, or too craven, but he didn't want to frighten her off by being too bold, either. Should he tell her about the cosy nest he'd built in the trellis, or was that too forward? By the time the Sun was up Robin was in a complete conniption. He could hardly hop straight, and didn't dare fly.

And there she was. Foraging in the grasses on his side of the flock, casting quick little looks his way. He could hear the flock leader making a head-count and discussing the day's objectives. The flock was headed north and they were getting ready to take off. Robin was in a tizzy.

Suddenly he bounded across the lawn, grabbed a blooming daffodil, and ripped it up out of the ground. Then Robin strutted awkwardly up to the young female, and presented it to her.

The whole flock of robins started to laugh and chitter and make a fuss, but Robin couldn't hear them. Nor could she.

She bowed her head and blushed.

Robin tried to make one of his speeches. Not a sound came out. The two birds stared at one another.

Finally Robin summoned up all his courage.

"Please stay?" He croaked.

She ducked her head and whispered, "Yes."

All the robins cheered.

Which is why there is now a clutch of little blue eggs in that nest in the trellis, and why you must be very careful not to make a fool of yourself in the Spring.



Photo & Sculpture: Bryce Muir

Bryce Muir

Reprinted from Local Myths with permission of the author.

Education Spotlight

Bay Day

Long ago we promised our Spring Bay Day Guides excellent weather, lots of fun and a good but quick lunch in a spectacular and powerful spot on the east bank of the Chops where nearly 40% of Maine's water rushes by. On a brilliant Tuesday, May 22 after a week of foul weather, FOMB delivered everything we promised. This was our most complicated and largest Bay Day ever with 18 different and simultaneous hands-on sessions for 260 4th and 5th graders from around the Bay. Special thanks go to Kathleen McGee for doing the bulk of organizing and follow-up for this event while our new Executive Coordinator, John Eder gets acquainted.



Students, faculty and parents from Chop Pt. in Woolwich, Williams Cone in Topsham, Bowdoinham, Bowdoin, Marcia Buker in Richmond, Dresden and West Bath schools attended 3-fifty minute workshops each, from an offering of: vernal pools, trees, geology, watershed modeling, macro-invertebrates, birds, archaeology, ecology, found and environmental art, Merrymeeting Bay wildlife, beach seining, dogs in conservation, mapping, anadromous fish printing, and native Americans of the Bay.



As with most of the work we do at FOMB, it is in large part dedicated volunteers that make it possible.

For Bay Day, our deepest thanks go to:

Chaperones-

Petey & John Ambrose, Macky Bennett, Robin Brooks, Carole Dyer, Kathie Duncan, Ruth Gabey, Joan Llorente, Steve Musica, Dick & Beverly Nickerson, Laura Piampiano, Pippa & Milo Stanley, Jack Thompson, David & Regine Whittlesey.

And Guides-

Allison Baird, John Berry, Dan Coker, Kent Cooper, Sarah Cowperthwaite, Mark DesMueles, Ruth Deike, Paul Dumdey, Steve Eagles, Ed Friedman, Nate Gray, Kerry Hardy, Tom Hoerth, Kathleen McGee, Nancy Murphy, Jay Robbins, George Sergeant, Jamie Silvestri, Tom Weddle, Sue Westlake, & Meg Wooster.

Many thanks also to Frank Hayward, Peter Willard and Chops Pt. School for hosting us, Wild Oats Bakery for helping to feed our volunteers and to Martha Spiess and John Eder for filming-watch for us at Sundance.



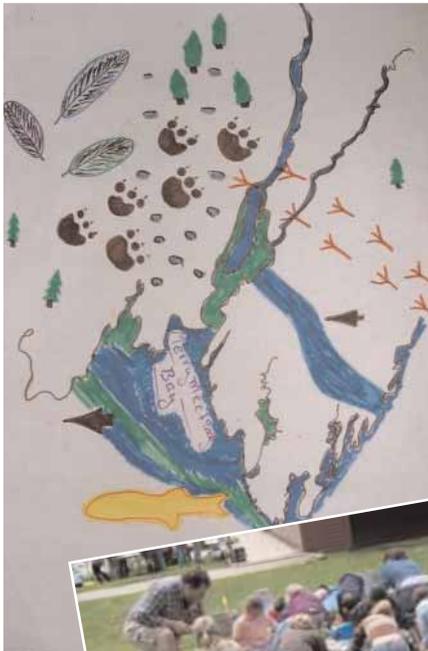
In-School Visits

When was the last time you had a bobcat in class? How about a sturgeon or some owls? Besides our twice yearly Bay Days we provide school visits with volunteers' expert in a variety of subjects. Volunteers also are able to bring an assortment of taxidermy mounts to regular or art classes where any number of lessons can be conducted.

This year for the second time we were invited to be a part of the Bowdoinham Community School Elective program. Students choose from offered electives for what will be an extended study program taking place for 5-one hour sessions over 5 weeks. In our "Be a Friend of the Bay" elective, students learn about Merrymeeting Bay birds, mammals, native Americans/archaeology, and migratory fish incorporating all of these things into beautiful and often fanciful maps they make of the Bay.

For in-school visits, many thanks to volunteers: Wayne Robbins, Joan Llorente, Kathie Duncan, Kathleen McGee, Andy Cutko, Ed Friedman, Paul Dumdey and Nate Gray.





R. I. P.



Photos: Monica Chau

For artist Monica Chau, retracing the past is a central and recurrent theme in her work. It is the gaps formed between history and memory or between factual events and our recollections that she attempts to disclose. The sense of place and time that her work alludes to, is suspended between layers of remembering and forgetting, seeing and not seeing, so that the junction between historic markers (physical or psychological) and memory spaces is made more visible.

R.I.P. (Rest in Peace), refers to the ever-declining historic populations of native fishery that have inhabited the Gulf of Maine watershed. Headstones were created using reclaimed barn wood that makes an iconic reference to Maine's agricultural and economic history. Each headstone is marked with a wood-burned image dedicated to a particular endangered, threatened, or extinct fish. Some fish are easily identified—Atlantic Salmon, Halibut, Cod, or Shortnose Sturgeon—while others from our recent past are vague recollections (Shad, Flounder or Bluefish).

Monica's installation was selected to be a part of the Portland Museum of Art's 2007 Biennial exhibition that ended June 10th. Her work, seen by an estimated 15,000 museum goers will help build the rising tide of public support for the necessity of fishery restoration via better management at sea and free access to native spawning and nursery habitat. The Board of Environmental Protection has continually rebuffed our efforts for

continued on page 6

R.I.P.

continued from page 5

safe passage as have the Department of Environmental Protection and the Assistant Attorney General staffing the BEP. Other agencies, the Department of Marine Resources and US Fish & Wildlife Service will not take action due to policy decisions at reasonably high levels and the legislature as well, for the time being at least, decided not to make a historic decision in support of our fish restoration Bill, LD 1528.



R.I.P. is just another example of people leading the government and media in calling attention to important issues of the day and demanding change. We came from the oceans, and for many reasons, our survival still depends on keeping them healthy.

On May 21, the Portland Press Herald ran an editorial against our introduced legislation LD 1528 calling for safe up and downstream passage for migratory fish at all dams in Maine. Readers overwhelmingly took issue with the editorial. We include the editorial and several typical reader response comments below. The tide is rising. Time and tide wait for no man. Beware the elvers...

Fish-friendly dams are a laudable goal, but LD 1528 pushes too hard.

May 21, 2007

— There was a time when diadromous fish — those with life cycles in both salt and fresh water, including alewives, shad and Atlantic salmon — abounded in Maine.

Those fish were important parts of our early economy -- until dams posed even greater economic promise. Paper mills and hydroelectric power companies

capitalized on the tremendous energy of water flowing through turbines rather than freely through its natural channel.

Unfortunately, turbines, dams and fish did not mix, and many species were decimated as spawning runs became impassable.

A bill before the Legislature, LD 1528, would aim to restore Maine's diadromous fish populations by requiring that owners of dams in fresh and estuarine (salt-and-fresh) provide "safe and effective upstream and downstream passage" of diadromous fish. The bill also allows hefty fines and the ability of citizens to sue by alleging noncompliance.

A restoration of fish populations would be a benefit to Maine, but LD 1528 is too sweeping an approach. The cost to hydroelectric companies and paper companies such as Sappi Fine Paper in Westbrook is not known, but must be weighed. According to Sappi officials, fish passages can cost in the millions of dollars. Even if that's a high estimate, a mandate of widespread dam retrofitting could threaten jobs.

In the meantime, progress on river restoration is being made. A recent federal mandate calls for fish passages to be added to five Sappi-owned hydropower dams on the Presumpscot River. Another proposal is looking at a passage on the Cumberland Mills Dam in Westbrook, another Sappi property.

River restoration is a worthy endeavor with many long-term benefits, but we just can't afford to shackle other interests right now.

Reader comments:

1. *Once again we are being presented with false choices—jobs or the environment, hydropower or fish. In this day and age, we all have to be conscious of the need to become less dependent on fossil fuels and the need for good jobs, but sacrificing our rivers and the creatures that depend on them is not the answer. The rivers of America have been giving their share for economic prosperity in a myriad of ways for the last 250 years. It's time we gave back.*

People are struggling to keep Atlantic salmon alive, to bring back the harvest of alewife and shad and keep the American eel from becoming another lost creature. No environmental group that I know of is getting rich and is prospering from citizen suits or any other tools that can be used to protect these species. On the contrary, many are hanging in there at great personal costs to do what they see as the right thing for the natural world.

While we may not agree on the methods or what should be done, let's not attribute sinister motives to people doing this work and we will do the same for you.

The PPH is looking in the wrong place when they say environmentalists go too far and the costs are too great for industry. The costs are too great for rivers and always have been. Take a hard look at corporate America's priorities and our government's energy policies and see if there isn't a better way than taking another 50 years to change policy and fix the damage we have done to our river systems. If not now, WHEN?

2. *I was shocked to see this editorial in a newspaper that has advocated for a balanced approach for years. This editorial is locked into questionable economic assertions and ignores the other two values of sustainability - Environment and Community. I look forward to seeing a return to a more balanced approach to the common good.*

3. *This editorial blithely buys into the same false arguments that business interests and their elected friends have used for centuries: that dams somehow create more jobs than would exist in the ecosystems they disrupt; that dams and fish are an "either-or" proposition; and that fishways are impossibly costly. None of these are true, but by repeating them often enough they become a public mantra; like those "weapons of mass destruction" we've spent \$400 billion looking for so far.*

In fact, dam owners have used every trick in the book since day one to stall, avoid, repeal, and outright defy the common-sense laws that have been passed in defense of our rivers. They're still doing it, with the necessary wink and a nod from our governor and his commissioners, and apparently this paper as well.

Notice the editor's subtle use of inflammatory words: lowly citizen lawsuits would merely "allege" non-compliance; yet SAPPi officials' cost estimate of "millions of dollars" is treated

as solid fact. He tells us that widespread dam retrofitting could “threaten” jobs, without acknowledging that restored fisheries could create new ones—perhaps more than we have at present!

Just as citizen referendums are a necessary check on our legislative branch, so too are citizen lawsuits a necessary balance to a dysfunctional executive branch. When our state agencies won't enforce existing environmental laws against pulp/paper or hydroelectric companies, how else can we insist on the law being upheld? DEP's last commissioner had to step down a year ago because of thinly-veiled collusion with dam owners on the Androscoggin River to avoid environmental compliance; it should be quite clear to all by now that the fix is in between big paper, big hydro and the Blaine House.

LD 1528 is exactly the dose of iodine needed to start cleaning up the wounds to Maine's fisheries; we shouldn't miss this chance just because of dam owners whining about how it's going to sting.

4. The editorial fails to note the fact that fish passage at dams in Maine is already a mandatory requirement of the federal Clean Water Act and Maine's water quality statutes, as affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2006 and the Maine Supreme Court in 2005 and reported by the PPH itself. The problem is that Maine's DEP refuses to enforce Maine law already on the books in this respect—which is why LD 1528 is required.

Greetings

continued from page 1

you have a need to honor your own personal commitment to protecting the Bay through volunteering and supporting FOMB's work with your dollars. I want to be there to assist you in meeting this commitment in every way I possibly can.

My goal is to help each and every member know the feeling of power in working together to make a difference because I know in this day and age; it is a gift to our sanity and to our souls to know that we are actively contributing to positive solutions. In time I hope to meet with each and every member. I want to get to know you and to find out how I can help you meet your needs and fulfill your own goals for FOMB. I always want to recognize our members for their good work and support because it's your individual efforts that makes everything we do at FOMB possible.

Please feel free to contact me and let me know your questions, ideas and concerns or call just to chat. I look forward to working with you.

In your Service,
John Eder
fomb@gwi.net • 871-0317

FRIENDS OF MERRYMEETING BAY

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- Nate Gray (Freeport)
- Steve Musica (Richmond)Treasurer
- Martha Spiess (Freeport)
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- Research and Advocacy
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- Kermit Smyth725-8420

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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

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

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- Renewal
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- Please send me information about volunteer opportunities

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

**In Memory of
Linwood Rideout**
April 16, 1917- June 10, 2007
For many of us, if there was one man who epitomized the essence of Merrymeeting Bay, it was Linwood Rideout, a legend in his own time. We will miss him, a long-time friend of the Bay. Our thoughts are with his family and friends. Read more about Linwood on our web site at www.friendsformerrymeetingbay.org

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Last but not least

Special Volunteer Thanks to: Pippa Stanley, Michelle & Stan Moody, Kerry Hardy, Kathleen McGee, Vance Stephenson, Martin McDonough, Martha Spiess, Piers & Gerry Bierne, Monika Kirtland, Fran Leyman, Ed Friedman, Jim Connolly, John Eder, Michael Ebert, Mark Rideout and staff of the Bowdoinham Recycling Barn.

Bay Cleaner from Volunteer Efforts Thanks to the efforts of eleven volunteers at the annual FOMB Cleanup, two overflowing pickup trucks were filled with trash and twenty-five tires recovered from the Merrymeeting Bay Wildlife Sanctuary and the stretch of shore between Abbagadassett and Pork Point.

Thwings Point Protection Completed In January, the Nature Conservancy sold the Thwings Pt. farm and adjoining protected 10 acres. The balance of the 70 or so acres with extensive frontage on the Kennebec in Woolwich had already been sold to the State of Maine to be managed by the Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife. This completes a protection process initiated by FOMB several years ago and adds to large area of protected frontage and acreage on the east side of the Bay. Thanks to the Maine Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, MDIF&W, the Maine Wetlands Protection Coalition, John & Jeanette Cakouros and Claire & Michael Robinson.

Easement Incentives set to Expire If you are considering the donation of a conservation easement, please remember that at this point, improved tax incentives offered for such a donation are set to expire at the end of 2007. Easements must be completed by then to qualify. Please contact Ed Friedman for more information. 666-3372.

Outdoor Wood Boilers The issue of harmful outdoor wood boilers [OWBs], that FOMB helped bring to the fore in our first speaker series presentation of the season, has since gathered legs around the state producing a number of bans, moratoriums and restrictive legislation aimed at addressing air emission and health problems. Thanks to Beth and Steve Thomas, Norm Anderson, Ed Miller, Kathleen McGee, Seth Berry and Sharon Treat.

Stay Tuned We have lots going on between quarterly newsletters. If you are not receiving our occasional e-mails with volunteer opportunities, news, special events and calls to action and would like to stay tuned in, please send your e-address to us at fomb@gwi.net