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Students get their hands dirty learning about Merrymeeting Bay

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay host the return of Spring Bay Day to a little over 100 fourth graders from four different elementary schools.

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Paul Bagnall *The Times Record*

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Maine Department of Transportation Senior Environmental Manager Eric Ham teaches watershed modeling to fourth graders during Spring Bay Day at Chop Point School in Woolwich on May 14. *Paul Bagnall / The Times Record*

More than 100 fourth graders got a dose of sunshine and outdoor environmental education at Chop Point School in Woolwich on Tuesday.

Students representing Phippsburg Elementary School, Chop Point School, Fisher Mitchel School in Bath and Woolwich Central School attended Spring Bay Day after a multiyear pause on the event due to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Ed Friedman, chairperson of Friends of Merrymeeting Bay.

Children divvied up into a dozen excited and curious groups to visit 11 education stations to learn about the environment in and around Merrymeeting Bay. Each student group participated in rotating activities, including watershed modeling, taught by Maine Department of Transportation Senior Environmental Manager Eric Ham and landscape architect Kent Cooper.

“[I like] all the fun activities I get to do and hang out with my friends,” said 10-year-old Ella Hallett. “I learned about how to use a compass and about different types of fish and how they migrate as well.”

Using mud to build a watershed was one of 9-year-old Hudson Crosman’s favorite activities at Spring Bay Day, as Cooper shoveled mud onto wooden tables for kids to shape and pour water over.

Another education station, led by naturalist Elizabeth Walker, focused on fish migrations. Students simulated a fish trying to navigate obstacles they might encounter on their migration, ranging from predators to dams.

“We are trying to make it a really great combination of learn about the environment, have tons of fun and get really dirty if you can,” Friedman said.

Merrymeeting Bay is one of the largest freshwater estuaries in the world and it’s one of the reasons why it’s so special, Cooper said.

Biologically, Merrymeeting Bay is considered a tidal riverine and, geologically, an inland delta, according to a press release from Friends of Merrymeeting Bay. Spring Bay Day teaches kids about the unique Merrymeeting Bay where six rivers meet to drain nearly 40% of all the water in Maine and part of New Hampshire.

Merrymeeting Bay is the only body of water in Maine providing spawning and nursery habitat for all the migratory fish species in the Gulf of Maine.



Marine Mammals of Maine volunteers show fourth graders the length of an adult seal during the Spring Bay Day at Chop Point School on May 14. *Paul Bagnall / The Times Record*