



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. Article hyperlinks and color images are available online at: www.fomb.org

For more information, contact:

Ed Friedman
Chair
207-666-3372
edfomb@comcast.net



Ladder to the Pleiades

Hannah, who recently turned three years old, is teaching me about the stars. Far from being a liability to her, my own profound astronomical ignorance has turned out to be her boon and, through her, a boon to me as well.

The most important thing the kid has taught me about the stars is the brilliant, open secret that if you don't go outside and look up, you won't see anything. Every night before bedtime she takes my hand and insists that I get my bedraggled ass up and take her outside to look at the stars. If this sounds easy, ask yourself if you can match her record of going out every single night to observe the sky—something she has done without fail for more than a year now. It seems to me that Hannah has accomplished something impressive: she has perfect attendance at the one-room schoolhouse of night. That she has somehow brought her celestially illiterate father along is more amazing still.

Following the inexorable logic that makes a kid's universe so astonishing, Hannah insists on looking for stars no matter the weather. At first I attempted the rational, grown-up answer: "It just isn't clear enough to see anything tonight, honey." But her response, which is always the same, is so emphatic that it is irresistible: "Dad, we can always check." And so we check. And it is when we check that the rewards of lifting my head up and out of another long day come into focus.

One cold and windy night we stepped out and discovered, through a momentary break in an impossibly thick mat of clouds, a stunning view of Sirius blazing low in the Southeast. Another evening we stood in an unusual late winter fog and saw nothing—but then we heard the courtship hooting of a nearby great horned owl, followed immediately by the distant yelping of coyotes up in the hills.

At Hannah's insistence we even stand out in snowstorms to stargaze, and while we've never seen any stars on those wild, white nights, we've seen and felt and smelled the crisp shimmering that arrives only on the wings of a big January storm. Snow or no snow, she knows those stars are up there, and so she does easily what is somehow difficult for many of us grown-ups: she looks for them. Whether Hannah actually sees stars or not, in seeking them every evening she has forged an unbreakable relationship with the world-within-a-world that is night.

Questions are the waypoints along which Hannah's orbit around things can be plotted, and she has asked so many questions about stars for so many nights in a row that at last I've been compelled to learn enough to answer some of them. In doing so, I've stumbled into placing myself, my family, my home, on the cosmic map whose points of reference wheel across the sky.

We've learned a surprising number of stars and constellations together, and we each have our favorites. Now that we're in our second year of performing this unflinching nightly ritual, we're also having the gratifying experience of seeing our favorite



Ladder to the Pleiades, continued from page 1

summer stars, long gone in the high-desert winter, come round again on the dark face of the year's towering clock of night.

The other evening after supper, Eryn asked Hannah to make a wish. Without hesitating she replied "I wish I could have a ladder tall enough to reach the stars." As usual, I didn't know what to say. It is impossible to dismiss a three-year old kid—who, among other things, discovered the cosmos without much help from me—when she articulates a hope that is at once so perfectly reasonable and so beautifully impossible.

Before she goes to sleep, Hannah and I look at the \$6 cardboard star wheel I bought to help us identify constellations. Too tired to make much of it, I toss the disc down on her bed in mild frustration. But she picks it up, holds it upright in front of her in both hands, stares earnestly out beyond the walls of her room, and begins to turn it left and right as if it were a steering wheel.

"Where you going?" I ask. "Pleiades," she replies. "Want to come?"

* * *

When the pagans celebrated feasts to honor the Pleiades, they first extinguished every fire in the land so as to better view the Seven Sisters ignited in the heavens. Our age, too, must find some ritual to honor the stars, for darkness is the only mother from which starlight can be born. Modern connotations of the word "benighted" are strictly pejorative: "to be unenlightened; involved in intellectual or moral darkness." But the word's archaic meaning sings a different story: "to be overtaken or affected by the darkness of the night." We cannot be enlightened without first becoming benighted. In nature Emerson tried to rekindle in his readers the miraculous wonder of stargazing: "If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance." What new myth can inspire us to restore the darkness that now lies hidden beneath the bright map of America?

How long will my little daughter continue to check nightly for the Pleiades if the light spewing from the sprawling city sends the other six stars into exile with their seventh sister? How can we measure what is lost when something that connects us viscerally to the universe simply ceases to be part of our sensory experience? I wonder what will have vanished when the nebulous glow of this celebrated cluster recedes, leaving only a blank spot on Hannah's treasure map of night. I have no way of knowing how the woman she grows to become will have been enriched by the presence of her sisterly stars, or impoverished by their silent vanishing into the artificially illuminated night. I do know that Hannah cannot bear the thought of her own little sister being born into a world from which the light of the lovely Pleiadean sister-doves has been exiled.

Michael P. Branch

This edited version of Michael's complete essay is printed with permission of the author. Given FOMB's legal efforts against CMP to keep the sky dark and the general dearth of dark sky ordinances in Maine communities, it is a privilege and opportunity to present this work. The complete work, well worth reading, is found in Michael's book, *Raising Wild: Dispatches from a Home in the Wilderness*. Shambhala/Roost Books (distributed by Penguin Random House), 2016. <http://michaelbranchwriter.com>.

Community Solar

After seeing success in states like New York, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts, community solar has finally been allowed to expand in Maine, thanks to a new law passed in 2019. This new opportunity allows Mainers to support the development of clean energy without installing solar panels on their roof or paying significant up-front costs to participate. Instead, community solar is all inclusive. Anyone can join a community solar project as long as they live in the same utility territory as the solar farm. That means homeowners, renters, and business owners alike are eligible.

Many solar developers are beginning to offer community solar programs to Maine ratepayers; this information is provided largely by [PowerMarket](#), a company with Maine employees that is offering community solar in the state but the article does not constitute a FOMB endorsement of them or of any particular community solar vender.

Continued on next page

Community Solar, continued from page 2**Belfast solar farm, December 2020**

How It Works

Participants can subscribe to a portion of a community solar project by signing up for one in their utility's service area. The clean energy produced by their share of the community solar project is supplied to the utility, which then credits the customer for the dollar equivalent of those solar-generated kilowatt hours, lowering their electricity bill. This allows the utility grid to rely less on energy produced by fossil fuels.

Customers get two bills: one from CMP and one from PowerMarket. The CMP bill is reduced by the solar credits. The PowerMarket bill is for the same amount as the solar credits, at a 10% discount (varies with vender).

The discount is an incentive to go solar. It comes from the margin between wholesale

and retail electricity supply rates. It's just like the retailer having a sale on his goods: he can mark up his goods 20% from wholesale (as a guess/example) and still offer 10% off retail to customers and be making some money. PowerMarket looks at the number of kilowatt hours you used in the past 12 months to estimate how many of the panels in the solar farm need to be allocated for you.

Why People Join

Community solar helps strengthen communities and brings people together to support the development of clean energy in their area. It gives people a way to stand up against the use of fossil fuels in their community by supporting clean and locally produced energy. In addition to what community solar means for their community, many join a project near them because they can save money on their monthly electricity bill. Customers are guaranteed to save 10% on the community solar credits they receive.

Finally, many people join community solar because of its convenience. Community solar does not require customers to put solar panels on their roof, handle the maintenance of solar panels, own their own home, or pay anything to join. It is easy to give community solar a try because the sign-up process is simple and there are no fees if a customer decides to end their subscription with 60 days notice.

Who Is PowerMarket?

PowerMarket is an employee-owned community solar management company with three employees in Maine. They manage community solar projects across nine states. The first five solar projects in Maine are located in Baldwin, Belfast, China, and Gardiner (2). They also have one in Waldoboro, reserved for larger business subscribers.

For More Information

- PowerMarket team: (207) 280-8130 or <https://powermarket.io/>
- Maine Office of the Public Advocate [Community Solar Web page: https://www.maine.gov/meopa/electricity/community_solar](https://www.maine.gov/meopa/electricity/community_solar)
- *What's the deal with all those mailings about community solar farms in Maine?* Jon Chrisos, WGME: <https://wgme.com/news/i-team/whats-the-deal-with-all-those-mailings-about-community-solar-farms-in-maine>

From the Chair

Charles Dickens wrote, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...” We are navigating an age where our republic threatens to fail, the country is divided, facts as truth seems a quaint and dated concept, and an unseen unpredictable killer stalks the human race. As humorist Andy Borowitz wrote for his May 12, 2015 Borowitz Report published in *The New Yorker*:

Scientists have discovered a powerful new strain of fact-resistant humans who are threatening the ability of Earth to sustain life, a sobering new study reports. The research, conducted by the University of Minnesota, identifies a virulent strain of humans who are virtually immune to any form of verifiable knowledge, leaving scientists at a loss as to how to combat them. “These humans appear to have all the faculties necessary to receive and process information,” Davis Logsdon, one of the scientists who contributed to the study, said. “And yet, somehow, they have developed defenses that, for all intents and purposes, have rendered those faculties totally inactive.” More worryingly, Logsdon said, “As facts have multiplied, their defenses against those facts have only grown more powerful.” Reaffirming the gloomy assessments of the study, Logsdon held out hope that the threat of fact-resistant humans could be mitigated in the future. “Our research is very preliminary, but it’s possible that they will become more receptive to facts once they are in an environment without food, water, or oxygen,” he said. (*Note: Realistic as the preceding report may sound, it is fictional. Too often, life imitates art.)*

One of our board members, Nate Gray, sums it up: “As a species we could not be more clever; but we’re not very smart.”

If not the best of times, there remain some reasons for hope and optimism. Today, as I write this, we had an optimistic regime change. Despite serious cynicism, tears came to my eyes with visions of unity and a renewed respect for human decency and the clean environment we all need, not just to flourish but to survive. In his first day on the job, President Biden took immediate action through executive orders to halt the Keystone XL pipeline, rejoin the Paris climate accord, restore vehicle emission standards, and hopefully reinstate protections for such special places as Bear’s Ears, marine sanctuaries, and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Thoreau opined, “. . .in wildness is the preservation of the world.” Brooke Williams writes in *Open Midnight*: “Wildness flows in our veins, contains the contents of our cells, connects our muscles to our bones. It is stronger than gravity keeping us from floating away. Wildness is an invisible force we take for granted. Wilderness is where we’re best able to feel and taste and hear the wildness inside us. Someday in the future, our descendants will look back and thank us for saving some wilderness, while wondering why we didn’t save more.” At FOMB, we are doing our best.

As with most every group and individual, Covid has crimped FOMB’s style somewhat, largely through losing the personal relationships and hands-on connections made yearly in our education programs. Unlike many other groups, however, our holistic mission allows us forward movement in meaningful ways—preserving the night sky from light pollution, protecting residents and the environment from CMP’s needless saturation of the Bay and beyond with radar radiation (a possible human carcinogen), monitoring and improving water quality, enhancing endangered species protections for species neglected by the state, protecting vital wildlife habitat around the Bay, and using research-informed advocacy to improve fish passage.

Thanks so much to all of our members and particularly to our Steering Committee (reelected via the Annual Appeal ballot insert). Our accomplishments would be impossible without you.

Respectfully submitted,

Ed Friedman

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.”

Charles Dickens

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay

2020 Accomplishments

Media

Print, internet, and TV: (Over 30), GE salmon lawsuit, Androscoggin upgrade, Chops lawsuit, Speaker Series, etc.

Volunteers

Approximately 1,500 volunteer hours (188 days), 20 volunteers

Membership

450 households
Speaker Series—120 people (cut short by Covid 19)
Newsletters—4

Grants

\$2,500—Androscoggin Upgrade
\$100,000—Centers Pt. Purchase
\$12,000—Chops/CMP lawsuit

Education

Non-school visits (450 people): library and science night
Web site updates

Conservation and Stewardship

Additional easement work
Continuous landowner outreach
Ongoing stewardship activities
Control of two phragmites stands in Bowdoinham
Monitoring all easement and fee properties
Protection of Centers Pt.

Research

Water quality monitoring—17 sites
Shad counting methodologies—Brunswick dam
Compilation of historic altered river flow research

Advocacy (postings, letters, testimony, etc.)

Submitted lower Androscoggin upgrade proposal
Lawsuit—GMO Atlantic salmon—Won
Healthy Rivers/Healthy

Gulf promoting safe fish passage
Smart meters—Amicus brief; PA—Won
Climate change—Green New Deal
Various national efforts—National Environmental Policy Act, ocean plastics, ESA, etc.
Posting fish consumption advisories
CMP Chops tower lighting—Filed nuisance lawsuit
Predator killing contests
EMF health effects

Primary Partners

The Archaeological Conservancy
Avian Haven
Maine Coalition to Stop Smart Meters
Quebec Labrador Foundation
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
Department of Marine Resources
Bowdoinham Public Library
Maine Land Trust Network
Friends of Sebago Lake
Department of Environmental Protection
Patagonia Outlet, Freeport
Curtis Memorial Library
Downeast Salmon Federation
Earthjustice
Center for Food Safety
Native Fish Coalition
Maine Coast Heritage Trust
Grow L+A
Trout Unlimited, Maine Chapter
Environmental Health Trust
Softlights.org



Atlantic Sturgeon:
Isabella-Zoe Cioffi



Advocacy Update

Endangered Species

Did you know Maine has its own Endangered Species Acts? Did you know we have separate Acts for Inland and Marine animal species? Did you know that while Maine lists endangered, threatened, and plant species of special concern that plants have no legal protection in Maine? Did you know there are a number of federally protected endangered and threatened species that do not receive protection under the Maine Acts and suffer because of this?

FOMB, working with the Native Fish Coalition and others, largely Atlantic salmon scientists and activists, is trying to fix this, at least for animal species. Prior to 1996, federal listing conferred automatic species inclusion under the [Maine Endangered Species Act](#) administered by IF&W and the [Maine Marine Endangered Species Act](#) administered by DMR. In 1996, we believe largely

because of the controversy with federally listing some of Maine’s Atlantic salmon, last in the country, as endangered, the Maine legislature changed this by law.

Why does this matter? If a species is listed under Maine law, there is strong impetus to develop a state-specific management plan. If listed only under the [U.S. Endangered Species Act](#), state management can conveniently fall through the cracks. In the case of salmon, for example, normally managed by DMR, management suffers (as does the species) because these “marine” fish spend their critical spawning periods and first few years in the jurisdictional “inland” waters of IF&W, where neither agency will take responsibility.

Federally listed species (E-endangered, T-threatened) not listed by the State are:

- Birds—red knot (E)
- Mammals—Canada lynx (E), blue whale (E), green turtle (E)
- Fish—Atlantic salmon (E), Atlantic sturgeon (T)

To remedy this, Senate Marine Resources Chair Dave Miramant, has, at our request, introduced *An Act to Protect Endangered Species Whose Life Cycle Includes Maine Land or Waters*. The bill requires any federally listed endangered or threatened species found in Maine to be listed under State law as well. It makes federal listing an equitable baseline. Most people assume federally listed species are listed here as well, but while this once was, it is no longer the case. The practical effect is that typically those species with only the federal listing do not have a state-specific management plan and at least some, like Atlantic salmon poised on the brink of extinction, require management protections for any chance of survival.



Androscoggin Upgrade

Hedging our bets on upgrading the lower Androscoggin water quality classification through our [proposal](#) submitted to DEP, Senator Ned Claxton of Auburn has introduced a bill to upgrade the Androscoggin between Gulf Island Pond and Merrymeeting Bay from Class C to Class B, which will reflect actual river conditions. The working title is *An Act to Reclassify Part of the Androscoggin River to Class B*. We are working on this effort with Grow L+A and others, including the Maine Chapter of Trout Unlimited and cities of Auburn and Lewiston.

CMP Towers

On January 15, the Business and Consumer Court [ordered](#) our [nuisance suit](#) dismissed because of federal preemption by the FAA and FCC. Following discussions with our attorneys, FOMB has decided to appeal to the Maine Supreme Judicial Court, based on what we believe to be errors of law on the part of the lower court. FAA tower lighting advisories are recommendations, not regulations, so we don’t believe they preempt state nuisance law, the basis for our complaint.



FOMB Preliminary 2020 Financial Statement

While 2020 was a miserable year from most perspectives, FOMB endured without financial repercussions. We are awaiting receipt of several documents to close the books and file our annual 990 charitable nonprofit tax returns with the IRS, but sufficient information is available to present a reasonable summary of fiscal results for last year. Cash income exceeded expenses by \$32,700; key revenue sources and expense drivers are summarized below.

Our total unrestricted liquid assets are approximately \$363,100 with an additional \$45,200 in restricted stewardship funds for a total of \$408,300. Only 6.3% of expenses in 2020 were towards fulfillment of administrative tasks, underscoring FOMB's ongoing dedication and focus upon its mission statement. The charitable rating organization GuideStar continues to award FOMB its Gold Seal for Transparency.

Respectfully submitted,

Vance Stephenson, Treasurer

2020 Income \$81,300	2020 Expenses \$48,600
Membership 29%	Programs 90%
Grants 18%	Administration 6%
Annual Appeal 17%	Membership & Fundraising 4%
Other 36%	

**Cash Income less Cash Expense
for 2020: \$32,700.**

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

Steering Committee

Ed Friedman, Chair (Bowdoinham)
 Vance Stephenson, Treasurer (Kettering, OH)
 Tom Walling, Secretary (Bowdoinham)
 Simon Beirne (Gardiner)
 Becky Bowes (Brunswick)
 Phil Brzozowski (Brunswick)
 Nate Gray (Vassalboro)

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

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay · PO Box 233 · Richmond, Maine 04357

Membership Levels

- | | | |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000+ Sturgeon | <input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Striped Bass | <input type="checkbox"/> \$20 Smelt |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$750 American Eel | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Shad | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$500 Wild Salmon | <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 Alewife | |

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

Name

Address

Town/State/Zip

Phone

Email

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal | <input type="checkbox"/> Send information about volunteer opportunities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Member | <input type="checkbox"/> I would like a sticker |



Thanks to Rebecca Bowes for newsletter layout.



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

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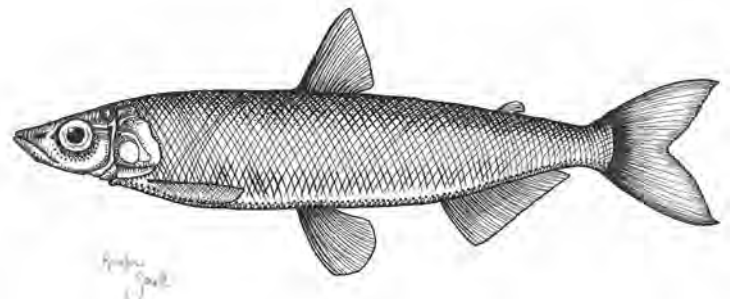


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Friends of Merrymeeting Bay
2021 Zoom Speaker Series
FREE • OPEN TO THE PUBLIC • FREE

7:00 PM: Login link posted at www.fomb.org before program

- **January 13:** *Seabrook Nuclear Plant-- Winds of Change?*
Doug Bogen, Exec. Director, Seacoast Anti-pollution League
- **February 10:** *Searching for Smelt: Citizen Scientists & Maine's Sea Run Fishes*
Claire Enterline and Danielle Frechette,
Research Biologists, Dept. of Marine Resources
- **March 10:** *The Sonic Sea—Voices of the Deep*
Chris Clark, Sr. Scientist & Researcher, Dept. of Neurobiology and Behavior, Cornell University
- **April 14:** *Native Fish Coalition: Protecting, Preserving, and Restoring Native Fish*
Emily Bastian, National Vice-Chair & Bob Mallard, Exec. Director, NFC
- **May 12:** *River History and the New Environmental Movement*
Scot McFarlane, River Historian



Rainbow Smelt: Isabella-Zoe Cioffi