

WATERSHED NEWS

Another Penobscot Bay Stewards Class Hits the Roads, Streams, Rivers, Woods, Islands.....

by
Kate Bennett
Pen Bay Steward Class of 2025







Learning about the strengths and fragility of the Belfast Bay Watershed is the focus of the inspired long-running Penobscot Bay Stewards program offered by the Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition. This past spring, 20 participants in the Stewards program spent two days a week traveling through the watershed learning about the rich cultural heritage of Maine, the life cycles of alewives, scallops, lobsters, and oysters, the efforts to foster the Atlantic Salmon population and the importance of the forests, landscapes and soils that the rivers cut through on their way to the Penobscot Bay. Now the volunteers have started to stand shoulder to shoulder with participants from past years to steward the watershed into the future.

The Pen Bay Stewards Program started over 30 years ago when the Federal Agency NOAA recognized that a training program could be vital to help regional residents learn about the dynamics of the watershed and the needs of the ecosystems onshore and offshore. Twenty years ago, the BBWC took over the program and its volunteers now provide this amazingly robust introduction to the conservation priorities and opportunities in the watershed.

Each day was chock full of speakers and activities. Participants were introduced to opportunities to stimulate and carry on conservation efforts geared to the needs of various aspects of the region's ecosystem. Two outstanding books acted as pre-reads for the sessions. Sherri Mitchell's <u>Sacred Instructions</u> provided an introduction to Indigenous ways of thinking, and the wisdom gained and now shared. <u>Lobster Coast</u>, by Colin Woodward, provided backstory and understanding about the ways of the people who depend on the coast.

Stewards, continued from page 1.

Friendships and passions were formed through deepening conversations about the region's heritage, wildlife, ecology and more. The knowledgeable people who spoke each day were the stars of the program. They stimulated questions that gave participants an increased understanding of the traditions that shape Maine lives and the challenges that the watershed and those who love and depend on it face today.

The Penobscot Bay Stewards program is a great way to get to know the region in more detail and meet new people and, through chosen volunteer actions, help sustain the Penobscot Bay ecosystem. The program is free. Participants are asked to contribute 30 hours of volunteer work with any local environmental organization over the next year. Applications will be available in January on the BBWC website.

Journey, we begin
Strangers for now, excitement
Possibilities









Alewives, kelp, the river
Wabanaki history
New views, expanding

Haikus by Kathy Muzzy, Penobscot Bay Steward, Class of 2025









Hurricane Island
Island Wildlife Refuge, birds.
Volunteers are we







Shaw Institute – thanks.

Nordic, Salmon, offshore wind

Make a difference

www.belfastbaywatershed.org



Oh, The Places I've Been by Don Hoenig Penobscot Bay Stewards class of 2025



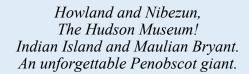
Until this past winter, I never knew there was such a thing as a Penobscot Bay Steward even though I've been a member of the Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition for many years. I guess it was February when I was talking to a couple of friends after a pickleball game at the Y. They told me about the Pen Bay Stewards program (which they had both completed) and suggested that it might be something I'd enjoy. I checked it out online and immediately submitted my application.

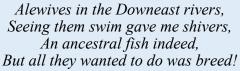
Our 2025 sessions started on May 6 and ran two days a week (with a break for Memorial Day) until "graduation" on June 17. It would be an understatement to say that I was astonished and pleasantly surprised by the course content and by the commitment and dedication of the BBWC volunteers who help run the program. I've lived in Maine for more than 42 years but I had never been to many of the places we visited. Hurricane Island and Indian Island were highpoints for me but every day was a new adventure. Furthermore, I only knew one person in our class of 17 and thus made many new extraordinary friends along the way.

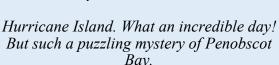
On the final day, we were each asked to reflect briefly on our experiences and, with apologies to Dr. Seuss, these were part of my remarks:



The places I've been Where I've never been before, So many places I've seen, How did I know what was in store? Highlights for me galore!







A high point for sure. What took them away from such a beautiful shore?





The entire experience was transformative. It provided me with new and enlightening insights into the Penobscot River watershed (where I've lived for well over half my life) and to the people who inhabit this region, especially the Wabenaki who have been here for thousands of years. Dan Kusierze said on the day we visited Howland, "The Penobscot River is a living relative of the Penobscot people." Their resilience is both heartbreaking and inspirational.

I'd be thrilled to talk with anyone who may be interested in applying for next year's class. Call me - 207-592-4593 or send me an email <u>Dochoenigvmd78@gmail.com</u>.

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Update - Sears Island

by Jeff Shula

While the Trump Administration's energy policies have been generally hostile to wind power, that doesn't mean plans for an offshore wind port on Sears Island are dead in the water. Complacency could be dangerous for environmental organizations that want to protect Sears Island from development, warns Rolf Olsen of Friends of Sears Island. "It's in the DNA of the DOT (Maine Department of Transportation, which is directing the push for a wind port on Sears Island) to build a port on Sears Island," Olsen says.

Although there have been no physical changes on the island since a state contractor built access roads last fall, there is still research going on and meetings being held. The Maine Governor's Energy Office in August issued a request for applications from Maine businesses that want to test their ideas for wind power development. The testing would take place at the quarter-scale floating demonstration project in Castine. There is \$380,000 available for the projects. Also, the Maine Offshore Wind Research Consortium Advisory Board is still holding meetings.

Meanwhile, MDOT commissioner Bruce Van Note is retiring this fall, and Gov. Janet Mills, whose Maine Won't Wait energy initiative, including her backing of the Sears Island project, is finishing up her two terms in office next year. "There's a lot going on, and seeing what happens in 2026 is probably the key to the future," observes Olsen.

Sears Island has been as popular as ever with hikers and sightseers in recent years. A summer monitoring program from 2019 to 2022 saw a steadily increasing number of vehicle visits, from 14,141 in 2019 to 16,842 in 2022. There's also been an uptick in postings to the Friends of Sears Island website, and the Campaign to Protect Sears Island has pledged to keep the island "wild and free."

Update - Little River Community Trail

by Jeff Shula

A popular hiking trail and land along the Little River in Belfast appears headed for permanent protection following the exit of Nordic Aquafarms.

Last January, Nordic abandoned plans for a \$500 million salmon farm and put its 54-acre parcel adjacent to the Little River's lower reservoir up for sale. Then, in April, the new Penobscot Bay Waterkeeper organization put the land under contract. Waterkeeper, a successor to Upstream Watch, is now in fundraising mode to come up with \$1.5 million before the planned closing on the property in mid-October.

Waterkeeper is an international environmental organization with 300 chapters in 46 countries. The local chapter has staked out the entire Penobscot River watershed -- admittedly a "huge" area, acknowledges Waterkeeper's Director Pete Nichols. "But we'll start small, and build relationships," he promises.

The first partnership is with Coastal Mountains Land Trust (CMLT), which will take over management of the 54 acres after the sale goes through. CMLT would protect the land in perpetuity through a conservation easement. The Little River Community Trail, which runs along the reservoir, would be undisturbed. The former Belfast Water District buildings on the site could eventually be converted into offices and meeting space for conservation-related community use.

In looking at the long-term future of the Little River watershed, Nichols also weighed in on the potential removal of dams creating the lower and upper reservoirs. The Downeast Salmon Federation and Penobscot Nation have been discussing that possibility. "We'd be involved in more of a support role" looking at water quality, etc., Nichols adds. He personally supports dam removal but admits it could be controversial and would take a long time to go through a full community process.

Making Friends With Nature: BBWC's Natural Literacy Report

by

Jenni Judkins, BBWC Natural Literacy Educator



The shortest, coldest days of the year can provide some of the brightest lessons. Twinkling eyes and rosy, smiling faces reflected the fun of being outdoors in nature with Ms. Jenni, BBWC's Natural Literacy Educator. This winter, students continued to learn about photosynthesis, exploring rockweed, bladderwrack and sugar kelp, three seaweeds common to the Maine coast. This provided a dramatic introduction to the world of algae and a perfect lead into lichens, which are easily spotted high up in leafless trees during the winter months. Students had fun learning about how fungi and algae work together to create lichen by playing "Symbiosis Tag" in knee deep snow and took lessons from the survival tactics of winter conifers.

When spring came, students watched as different plant buds swelled and then finally unfurled their delicate miniature leaves and beautiful blossoms. The snow melted, rains fell and the vernal pools became the place to be. As the school year rushed to its end, Ms. Jenni brought students on field trips to local preserves, state parks and beaches. Culminating another outdoor school year, classes shared the annual Forest Tea where, in an enchanted wood, the young humans found that an excellent way to connect with nature is to put themselves in her roots by taking on a different form – any tree, plant, animal, lichen, rock, water or air – and finding new appreciation.



"Thank you for being a great science teacher. These are my favorite things I learned about beavers....."

"My favorite lesson was the seaweed. You helped me learn about seaweed photosynthesis."

"My favorite thing you taught me was about trees. I love trees and you taught us a lot about them."



"Thank you for teaching us lots of science this year. I really enjoyed the Gibson Preserve field trips. My favorite part was probably collecting the different kinds of river animals ... Thank you for being an awesome teacher."

"I loved all your lessons on the solstices and the equinoxes. I love how you're so kind, you are great - 5/5 stars - and you brighten my day like one too."



Students who participated in BBWC's Fish Friends programs nurtured Atlantic Salmon eggs hatch into fry in the aquariums in their classrooms and then released them in Wescot Stream. Ms. Jenni accentuates this learning experience with songs and games that teach about the life cycle of fish they raised and the importance of the interconnected ecosystems of the streams, rivers, estuaries and ocean to the survival of this endangered species. *Continued on page 6.*

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Natural Literacy, continued from page 5.

Ms. Jenni also collaborated with 8th grade science teacher Samantha Poll to bring students from Wagner Middle School to the Penobscot River where they tested the chemical water quality at two locations.

Learning didn't end with the summer as Ms. Jenni introduced Belfast students to new science curricula that will be instituted next year. Students participated in activities demonstrating the difference between kinetic and potential energy. They used their own energy to walk a one-mile stretch of coastline along Belfast Bay and hiked up to one of the highest elevations in Belfast for a panoramic view of the bay, islands and inland ridges, with nature providing extra energy in a bounty of ripe blueberries that they found on the way.







BBWC's Natural Literacy Program - By the Numbers

Winter and Spring 2025

Schools	Grades	Unique Students	Program Hours	Student Contact Hours
Nickerson Elementary	4	19	9	171
Ames Elementary	4	32	29	464
Searsport Elementary	K,1,4	49	35.5	431
Captain Albert Stevens Elementary	K,1,2,4	88	74.5	1,106.5
Weymouth Elementary	K	38	22.5	427.5
Wagner Middle	8	60	5	100
TOTAL		286	175.5	2,700

Summer School 2025

Schools	Grades	Unique Students	Program Hours	Student Contact Hours
Belfast Schools	K-12	83	19.5	456.5
Searsport Elementary	4,5	12	6	72
TOTAL		95	24.5	528.5

A Transformative Trip to Hurricane Island

Ьy

Martha Conway-Cole Grade 6 Social Studies and English Teacher Troy Howard Middle School Board Member, Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition



This year, 14 lucky students from Troy Howard Middle School had the unique opportunity to spend five days at the Hurricane Island Center for Science and Leadership, immersing themselves in scientific exploration, physical challenges, and personal reflection. Accompanied by teachers Sydni Hosmer and Martha Conway-Cole, students counted scallops, climbed rocks, engaged with sustainable practices and experienced life in nature, away from their families and their phones. The experience was eye-opening, character-building, and unforgettable.

One of the central focuses of the trip was marine science. Led by working scientists, students participated in hands-on experiments and research. They examined plankton under microscopes, learning about the life cycles of phytoplankton and zooplankton and their critical role in our earth's oxygen supply. They helped sort, identify, and count scallop larvae. Through this work, they learned scientific methods and skills that measure the relative productivity of different marine zones.



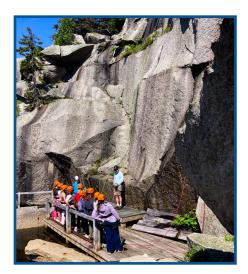




Beyond science, the students explored the island's rich history. On a guided history hike, they learned about Hurricane Island's past as a bustling quarrying community that once supported up to 600 residents. Students walked among the ruins of a church and imagined life in a now vanished town. They reflected on how this once thriving island economy collapsed almost overnight and was left abandoned. The physical remnants of this history provided a powerful backdrop for understanding resilience and change over time.

Continued on page 8.

Hurricane Island, continued from page 7.



Outdoor adventure was another key component of the trip. Students climbed rock faces in one of the island's old quarries—a challenge that inspired courage, teamwork, and personal growth. Even those who were hesitant or not typically athletic stepped up to try. Many who gave up at first and returned later to try again, climbing even higher on their second attempt. This spirit of persistence and growth was a living example of resilience. One student wrote in their journal:

"Rock climbing was very strenuous and definitely one of the trickiest activities I've ever done. I would definitely do it again. My favorite memory was probably when we were testing our boat and it tipped over right after my friend started paddling out. Something I'll take away from this experience is how much I enjoyed trying new things."

A highlight of the week was the "sustainability tour," which took students across the island to learn how it operates with minimal environmental impact. They saw how water is pumped from the quarry and purified, how composting toilets work, and how food waste from the dining hall is turned back into soil. They visited the vegetable gardens that supplied much of the food they had eaten, making the connection between their meals and the land. As each student was also responsible for chores - washing dishes, sweeping, and cleaning - students experienced the importance of working together to create a sustainable community.

Perhaps the most memorable moment came during a sunset hike. After dinner, students hiked through the woods to a high promontory known as Sunset Rock, where they sat on granite overlooking the water. A staff member invited everyone to observe five minutes of silence. During this quiet moment, surrounded by nature and the fading light, I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude and love for my home and for the students who shared this experience with me. Earlier, I had been frustrated by their loud singing and lack of awareness of their surroundings - but in that silence, something shifted. When we walked back, the students were noticeably calmer and more reflective. Their journals later revealed just how deeply the moment had touched them.



Students also made meaningful connections with peers from a Boston-area school, a group demographically quite different from ours. In the evenings, they played games, drew, read books, and socialized with students from the other school. Watching them interact gave my colleague and me the idea of starting an exchange program with an urban school - an opportunity we believe could be transformational for both groups.

The Hurricane Island trip was more than a school outing. It was a journey into science, history, nature, and self-discovery. Our students returned more confident, more connected to the world around them, and more aware of their own capabilities. Whether they were measuring scallops, climbing rocks, banding lobsters, or quietly watching the sunset, they were growing. This experience reminded all of us - students and teachers alike - what education can truly be when we step outside the classroom and into the world.

This is the third year that the Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition has funded this important experience for Troy Howard Middle School students. If you would like to contribute to this effort, send a contribution to BBWC earmarked "Hurricane Island."

Fall Outings



Saturday, September 13, 10:00 am - 12 noon - Tree ID Walk on the Rail Trail

Join us for a tree identification walk on the Belfast Rail Trail. Meet Sky Milstein, Environmental Steward with Belfast Department of Parks and Recreation, for a 2 hour exploration of trees, This walk is ADA accessible. Meet at the central Rail Trail parking lot (former Upper Bridge).



Saturday, November 15, 10:00 am - 12:00 noon - Geology Walk at the Oak Hill Granite Quarry

Join us to hike up to and explore the Oak Hill Granite Quarry with geologist Chris Mattson. Chris will give us a brief history of the not-so-brief history of its formation and its composition. Situated at the top of Quarry Hill, the venue offers great views of the bay and a chance to see some birds on high. Meet at 10:00 at the Quarry gate at 592 Oak Hill Road, Swanville. Bring water, binoculars if you like, and wear rugged shoes.

For more information: Call 207-338-1147. No texts please.

Winter Birding on the Bridge Resumes







Winter is a great time to view the water birds that make Belfast Bay their home. Join expert birder Gary Gulezian and his magic scope on the Belfast Armistice Bridge (footbridge) at 9:00 - 10:30 am to view them.

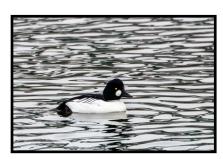


Photo: Gene Randall

Saturday, December 13
Saturday, January 10
Saturday, February 7
Saturday, March 7



Photo: Gene Randall

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Fall Programs



Saturday, October 4, 10:00 am - 3:00 pm Climate Resilience Fair

At Steamboat Landing, over 40 vendors will provide solutions for a sustainable community. Get information about solar, heat pumps, sustainable building solutions, electric bikes and cars. Enjoy family activities, music and food. Rain date: Sunday, October 5.

Saturday, October 11, 10:00 am - 12:00 noon - We Love Bats Family Fun Event

Children ages 5 to 10 and their parents are invited to this fun morning in the Abbott Room at the Belfast Free Library. Come at 10:00 to make a bat costume. From 11:00 to 12:00, bat lover and expert Cassandra Knudsen will talk about these fascinating creatures in a program for children and their parents. (Limited to 15 children; no limit for parents.)





Thursday, October 16, 6:30 - 8:00 pm - <u>The Elvesphere</u> Film Preview

Swimming across history, oceans and cultures, the American eel fuels a \$20 billion industry here in Maine. Join filmmakers Michelle Christie and Eli Kao in the Abbott Room of the Belfast Library to preview their film, which explores the American Eel and this lucrative and challenged industry. Co-sponsored by Shannaghe, a Belfast residency for writers, artists and environmentalists.

Fall Speaker Series Climate Resilience: What's Going on in Our Communities

Presented by member organizations of the Waldo County Climate Action Coalition (WCCAC)

Tuesday, September 16th, 6:30 pm: What's Going on with Solar Policy

Emily Rochford, Community Engagement Manager, Maine Community Power Cooperative and John Luft, Residential Sale Manager, Revision Energy will present what current energy policies mean for solar options going forward.

Tuesday, October 21st, 6:30 pm: What's Going on with our Fisheries

Clea Harrelson, University of Maine doctoral student, will discuss the impacts the warming ocean is having on the lobster fisheries and how the communities who depend on it are affected.

Tuesday, November, 18th 6:30 pm: What's Going on with Maine's Climate Action Plan

Hilary Landfried, Climate Policy Advisor and Maine Climate Council Coordinator with the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, will give updates on the plan and discuss Maine's strategies for resilience.

This series will continue into Spring 2026—Find more information on the WCCAC website: https://www.waldoclimateaction.org

All programs will take place in the Abbott Room of the Belfast Free Library, with a Zoom option. Visit waldoclimateaction.org/events-calendar to sign up for Zoom

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Thank You Belfast Community Co-op Shoppers!



Pictured left to right: Co-op Marketing Coordinator Becca Lane, BBWC Board Members Gene Randall, Pat Gladding, Joy Bowles, and Josh Goldstein, Co-op Marketing Manager Jamie Cermak.

The Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition received \$5,978 in March from Belfast Community Co-op shoppers through the Co-op's Common Cents program, which will be used to support BBWC's natural literacy, water quality, public education and other programs. Thank you, Co-op Board for this wonderful program and Co-op shoppers for your generosity.

BBWC Board Meetings are open to the public. They are held on the 3rd Thursday of each month, September through June, 4:00-5:30 pm in the Abbott Room of the Belfast Free Library.

Contact gbiddi@gmail.com for dates of upcoming Board Meetings. We welcome your attendance and interest.

BBWC Committees & Contact Information:

BBWC Board: Greg Biddinger - gbiddi@gmail.com

Community Engagement Committee: Don Trites - dgtrites@tidewater.net

Fish Friends: Mike Lotito - mikejlot@aol.com

Trail Crew: Dianne Torresen - dktorresen@gmail.com, Chuck Easley - trees.cwe@gmail.com

Plastic Pollution Solutions: Kris Shula - shulafamily@gmail.com

Natural Literacy Programs, Merlin Club: Cloe Chunn - cloechunn@gmail.com

Butts Be Gone: Kate Hanson - katehanson207@gmail.com

Communications, Newsletter: Ann Kennedy - annkinmaine@gmail.com

Water Quality Monitoring: Joy Bowles - joyl.bowles@gmail.com Earth Day/Arbor Day: Pat Gladding - patricia.gladding@gmail.com

Penobscot Bay Stewards Program Alumni: Pat Gladding - patricia.gladding@gmail.com

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Volunteer Opportunities Available

The Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition is looking for committed individuals who are interested in the health of the Belfast Bay watershed and have time and energy to share. Work with a great group of people, have fun, and make a positive impact on our environment. At this time, we are looking for:

Water Quality Volunteers: Help monitor the quality of water in Belfast Bay. Learn how to take and assess samples of bay water and how to interpret results.

Trail Crew for Little River Trail: Trail Crews maintain the Little River Community Trail in Belfast and the Davis Bog Trail in Morrill. Crew members are called upon when trail work is needed. This work is fun, friendly, and very important to our community.

Natural Literacy Volunteers: Help train the next generation of eco-warriors in one of our many school and community based programs.

To get involved, see the list of Committee contacts on page 11.



New Members Invited!

Jump on board and help expand and strengthen our work in the community and watershed.

Visit our website or email us at info@belfastbaywatershed.org.

BBWC Board of Directors

Greg Biddinger, President Joy Bowles, VP Gene Randall, Treasurer Kate Hanson, Secretary Emily Berry Cloe Chunn Martha Conway-Cole Pat Gladding Josh Goldstein Ann Kennedy John Krueger Mike Lotito Lynda Munro Lee Reilly Kris Shula Dave Thomas John Tipping Staff Jenni Judkins, Natural Literacy Educator Parker Richardson, Publicity and

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Ann Kennedy, Editor Kate Bennett Cloe Chunn Jennifer Craig Meg Haskell Katie McDonald Jeff Shula

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Mission: The Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition works to support conservation and stewardship of natural, scenic and public access resources of the Belfast Bay watershed through research, community building and education.

Subscribe on-line to this newsletter and receive monthly reminders of our activities. Subscribe at www.belfastbaywatershed.org or send an email to info@belfastbaywatershed.org.

Please visit our website calendar for updates on outings and programs.

BBWC wishes to thank all our individual members, community partners and supporting businesses, including the Belfast Free Library, the Belfast Food Coop, the Belfast Garden Club, Coastal Mountains Land Trust, First National Bank, Front Street Shipyard, Fruits of Our Labor, GO Logic, The Green Store and the Little River Veterinary Hospital. Many thanks to our granting organizations: Leonard C. and Mildred F. Ferguson Foundation, Maine Community Foundation, New England Grassroots Environmental Fund and the Schwartz Family Foundation.

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