



Belfast Bay  
Watershed  
Coalition

# WATERSHED NEWS



## Butts Are Going!

Ridding Belfast of Cigarette Waste

by

Kevin Connolly



This fall, a year since we placed 14 Butt Butlers around Belfast, our committee met to assess the success of the project. We first met in July, 2019. We found that a lot of research had been done, much of it by the Truth Initiative for their worldwide report. Here are a few of the highlights:

- 1) About 267 billion cigarettes are smoked each year in the US.
- 2) 75% of smokers self report as disposing butts on the ground or out their car window.
- 3) Since the 1990's, coastal and urban cleanups This makes them the most prominently littered items on U. S. roadcigarette butts have consistently comprised 30-40% of all items collected in annual international ways.
- 4) In the USA, over 1 million cigarette butts have been collected from our beaches and inland waterways.

(You can read more of this report at <https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/harmful-effects-tobacco/tobacco-and-environment>.)

Besides being an eyesore, discarded cigarette butts are a major source of pollution. Filters in cigarette butts remove toxins from tobacco for the sake of the smoker, who may carelessly toss the butt after finishing the cigarette. But, while these filters protect smoking humans, the accumulated toxins poison and kill living beings in soil and water. Birds and other animals may mistake them for food and eat them but, even if organisms do not eat the butts, they can be poisoned by toxins that seep into our environment. Cigarette filters are made from cellulose acetate, a plastic which, while technically biodegradable, only degrades under severe biological circumstances. In practice, cigarette butts tossed on the streets and beaches do not biodegrade.

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Information we obtained from the Maine branch of the American Lung Association shows there are over 4,000 substances found in cigarettes, including ammonia, arsenic, butane, DDT, acetone, cadmium and formaldehyde. Studies show that organic compounds (such as nicotine, pesticide residues and metal) seep from cigarette butts into aquatic ecosystems, becoming acutely toxic to fish and microorganisms. In one laboratory study, the chemicals that leached from a single cigarette butt (soaked for 24 hours in a liter of water) released enough toxins to kill 50% of the saltwater and fresh water fish exposed to it for 96 hours.

Motivated by these disturbing facts, our committee started a program to encourage the safe removal and disposal of cigarette butts. We found a company called Terracycle, based out of Trenton NJ, that would accept collected cigarette waste and recycle them. Typically, they make recycled industrial products, such as plastic pallets. Even better for us, they do this for free and pay for the shipping costs for voluntary efforts. It was a win-win: environmentally friendly and FREE to us! We installed the 14 units you can see in downtown Belfast. They come with a 20 year warranty, are made in Maine with USA materials, and are weather, rust and fireproof.

So, how are we doing? We collected 843 cigarette butts from the downtown area of High and Main streets in October, 2019, before the Butt Buttlers were deployed. One year later, after installing the Butt Buttlers, 426 butts were collected in the same area. That's a decrease of 417 butts. In our units (we have 14 deployed) we have collected over 1000 butts in 7 months! That is over 2,000 cigarette butts prevented from going into our waterways. Most importantly, we have seen greater use every month in most locations.

These results prove that our Park Your Butts Here campaign has been successful and worthwhile. We hope to expand this program in the future by purchasing more units. We would like to place some of them at the Belfast Transfer Station, encouraging people to dispose of their household butts there. But, like many things in life, we have to be realistic during the pandemic.

We thank the City Council for allowing the placement of the units (we used no City funds), the business owners and BBWC who provided monetary assistance, and the Chamber of Commerce who provided a sounding board and print out our shipping labels. To purchase a Butt Buttler or join the volunteers for butt collection, please contact us through the BBWC website.

## Christmas Bird Count.

This year's Christmas Bird Count for the Greater Belfast Circle will take place on January 2. To participate, contact our website at

[info@belfastbaywatershed.org](mailto:info@belfastbaywatershed.org)

To view Seth Benz' video program about the Bird Count, click on this link:

[HTTPS://YOUTUBE/P6JPP0P3SUI](https://youtube.com/watch?v=P6JPP0P3SUI)

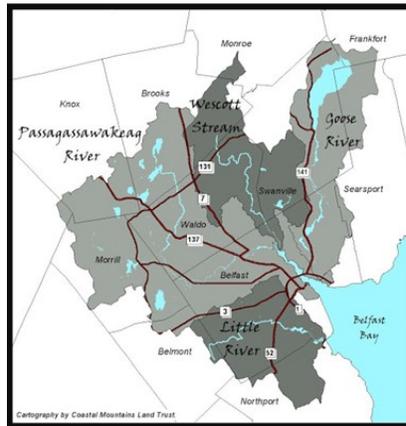
***“WINTER BIRD COUNT WARM-UP: PREPARING FOR THE ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT”***

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# The Belfast Bay Sustainable Watershed Initiative

by  
Greg Biddinger



In the fall of 2019, the Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition formed a work group charged with the task of developing a better understanding of the relationship between the communities in the Belfast Bay watershed and the natural systems in which those communities reside. The goal of our working group is to build support for behavior that will sustain our important watershed by communities and their citizens in the four drainages that support Belfast Bay, including Goose River, Wescott Stream, Pasagassawakeag River and the Little River.

Our first step is to plan and execute a watershed assessment, identify the natural and anthropogenic stresses on the watershed, and establish a baseline for condition of the watershed. To do this, we will identify and use all available scientific information relevant to the watershed, build the capacity to perform spatial analysis with geographic information tools and build a collaborative network with representatives of the communities in the watershed, local state, federal, academic and conservation scientists. After assessing the state of the watershed, we will then explore strategic opportunities for improvement of the watershed.

Along the way we will need to collect and analyze data from both field and online sources, develop computer-based maps of the watershed, and verify those maps through field observations. To accomplish this effort, we will seek funding in the form of grants and collaborate with municipalities, government agencies and other non-profit organizations. If you have an interest in the ecological integrity of the Belfast Bay and its supporting watershed and would like to participate, please contact Greg Biddinger ([gbiddi@gmail.com](mailto:gbiddi@gmail.com)) to discuss how you can help.

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# Winter/Spring BBWC/Library On-line Programs

There are no programs in December. All programs below are presently jointly with the Belfast Free Library on **Zoom**, and can be accessed on the Library and BBWC websites afterwards.



Lisa Pohlmann

## Thursday, January 21, 6:30 pm – How the Natural Resources Council of Maine Works to Protect Maine’s Forests and Wildlife

Lisa Pohlmann, Executive Director, and Melanie Sturm, Director of Forests and Wildlife

Lisa Pohlmann is the CEO of the Natural Resources Council of Maine. NRCM is Maine’s leading environmental advocacy organization with more than 25,000 members and supporters in Maine and beyond. Started by Maine people in 1959, NRCM is based in Augusta, is actively engaged in policy making, and works statewide to protect Maine’s woods, waters and wildlife.



Melanie Sturm

As NRCM’s Forests and Wildlife Program Director, Melanie Sturm is continuing the organization’s long history of protecting Maine’s remote places by monitoring development in the North Woods and ensuring the state’s scenic and natural character is preserved for years to come. Her work includes serving as NRCM’s point person for the Land for Maine’s Future program, ensuring forest protections are enforced, and tracking wildlife and land management regulations and policies.

**Thursday, February 18, 6:30 pm - TBA** Check the BBWC website for updates

## Thursday, March 18, 6:30 pm - What’s New in the Penobscot River?

Jason Valliere, fish biologist

Jason is a Marine Resource Scientist 1 for the Department of Marine Resources, Division of Sea-Run Fisheries and Habitat working on the Penobscot River Restoration Project. He will give an overview of diadromous fish restoration in the Penobscot River as a result of the Penobscot River Restoration Project



## Thursday, April 15, 6:30 pm - Running Silver! What does it take to restore river health? How can you fix a river?

Landis Hudson, CEO of Maine Rivers,

Maine Rivers is a statewide advocacy organization with a mission to protect, restore and enhance the ecological health of Maine’s river systems. She will talk about the relationship between rivers and the Gulf of Maine, and discuss how dam removals are shaping the future of river restoration efforts in Maine.

## Thursday, May 20, 6:30 pm - Youth Research on Belfast Bay

Dave Thomas, AP Environmental Science teacher at Belfast Area High School

Dave and students will report on their experimental research on environmental effects of invasive species and pollution. They will discuss who’s eating juvenile clams in Belfast Bay and what effect micro plastics have on the feeding rate of zooplankton.

*To register for a Zoom program: Go to the [belfastlibrary.org/events](https://www.belfastlibrary.org/events) and find the date of the program and the link to register. You will be notified by an email with a link to the program.*

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# Winter Birding from Belfast's Footbridge

by

Ron Harrell and Gary Gulezian

Because we cannot safely congregate to watch birds this winter, we hope you will have fun birding on your own. Birding at the footbridge can be rewarding in winter. There is an amazing variety of birds. Here are some helpful hints.

By winter, we mean the time from about mid-September to mid-April. Winter is the season when the most birds can be seen along seashore areas. This is when the gulls, ducks, loons, and other water birds have finished raising their young and gather along the non-frozen salt water areas where they can find their preferred foods. The footbridge in Belfast is a convenient location to see many of these species. Do your birding here during low tide, preferably during the first three hours or so of daylight. You can consult the website [www.usharbors.com/harbor/maine/belfast-me/](http://www.usharbors.com/harbor/maine/belfast-me/) for tide information.

Dress in appropriately warm clothing and bring a field guide, note pad, binoculars, and telescope (if you have one). Look for dabbling ducks (Mallard, American Black, Green-winged Teals, etc.) along the shores. In deeper waters, look for divers (Buffleheads, Goldeneyes, Cormorants, Loons, and the like). Look up into the sky keeping an eye out for eagles, hawks, and falcons. Scan the large pipe under the deck of the Rt 1 bridge several times for Peregrine Falcons.

Gulls often rest in large groups along shores or atop buildings, such as McCrum's. Scan such flocks carefully. Most of the gulls (95+ per cent) will be Herring Gulls, and you will see all four age classes. There will be a small number of Ring-billed Gulls and Great Black-backed Gulls. Once in a while you can find a Glaucous, Iceland, or Lesser Black-backed Gull. Occasionally, the gulls will suddenly all fly up at once. This is your cue to search the skies for a hawk, falcon, or eagle.

In the fall, beginning in October, we see Great Blue Herons, primarily on the east shore of the harbor. This is when they migrate south to their overwintering feeding areas. Search the east shore of the harbor carefully for them. They are spread out and camouflaged well. We typically see six or seven, but will occasionally find as many as 12.

A few words about loons. You may find Common Loons in the harbor and in Belfast Bay at any time of the year. Red-throated Loons are seen regularly from about November through March, but not in great numbers. During the summer, Common Loons are found primarily on fresh water ponds, lakes, and rivers where they nest and raise their young. When these areas freeze over, they move to the seashore where they can find food. Sometimes, in the spring, when the ice is delayed in melting from inland lakes and ponds, loons will extend their stay or stay because they are not yet old enough for nesting.



Barrow's Goldeneye



Double-crested  
Cormorant



Bald Eagle



Peregrine Falcon perching  
under the Route 1 bridge.



Herring Gulls



Lesser Black-Backed Gull



Red-throated Loon

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