



Belfast Bay
Watershed
Coalition

WATERSHED NEWS

Coming this spring – Pen Bay Stewards 2025

Be a part of this robust program that will educate and inform as you explore our beautiful environment

By Meg Haskell, Pen Bay Steward, Class of 2024



Penobscot Bay is one of the most ecologically, historically and economically important areas of the Gulf of Maine. Whether you've lived in the midcoast area for years or are a relative newcomer, there's much to learn about these cold ocean waters, the creatures who live in them and the human communities that rely on the continued health and beauty of the bay.

For more than 20 years, the six-week-long Penobscot Bay Stewards program has educated midcoast residents about this amazing body of water. Each spring, a group of about 20 adults participates in a series of day-long excursions, exploring a range of issues including contemporary shellfish farming and harvesting; indigenous cultures and practices; local efforts to restore migratory fish populations; the importance of sustainable forestry and agriculture practices; strategies for preventing and remediating pollution; the impacts of climate change and industrial development; and much more. Along the way, participants visit areas they might not otherwise see, meet knowledgeable experts, and make new friends.

Past participants will tell you – taking part in the Pen Bay Stewards program is a little like drinking from a firehose! Twice a week for six weeks, you go someplace cool, learn something new, and are home in time for supper. But the payoff is great, both for you and for the Bay. Because, although the program is free, you will be expected to donate a minimum of 30 hours of volunteer time over the following year, lending your knowledge, skill and enthusiasm to one or more of the many environmental groups that protect and promote Penobscot Bay and its surroundings.

The Stewards program is one of many ongoing educational and direct-impact programs offered through the Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition. Learn more about them all on the organization's website. Applications for the Penobscot Bay Stewards will open in January – mark your calendar!

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2024 Was a Very Good Year for BBWC

Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition's Annual Report

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.

In 2024, dozens of Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition (BBWC) volunteers organized a myriad of programs, activities, outings, and materials designed for different age groups and interests supporting our mission to protect our beautiful Belfast Bay watershed. Below are some of our accomplishments.

Brought Natural Literacy Education to Belfast Area Schools



- Funded Natural Literacy educator Jenni Judkins, who brought students outside to learn about their natural environment in five area elementary schools
- Initiated the Merlin Program, which involves students at Troy Howard Middle School in learning about their natural environment, in collaboration with teacher Kathie Gass
- Educated and involved students in raising and releasing salmon fry in 11 area schools with the “Fish Friends” program
- Distributed spruce seedlings and conducted educational activities in Arbor Day visits to elementary schools
- Led three school groups on Sears Island nature walks
- Organized and funded 14 middle school students for a week-long ecology camp at Hurricane Island Center for Leadership
- Engaged Belfast Area High School students in analyzing and graphing results from BBWC's Water Quality Monitoring Program

Developed and Coordinated Public Education Programs for Area Residents

- Presented six evening programs, in conjunction with the Belfast Public Library
- Brought together schools, area churches and organizations to develop and collaborate on Earth Day activities
- Facilitated three reading discussion groups about environmental books at the Belfast Free Library
- Organized and conducted the Penobscot Bay Stewards Program training and graduating a class of 24 Penobscot Bay Stewards who committed to 30 hours of volunteer work for area environmental organizations
- Posted educational materials on the BBWC website and published *Watershed News*, an online and print newsletter issued three times a year



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Improved our Environment Through Community Projects



- Involved the Waldo County Re-entry Center in our “Butts Be Gone” cigarette butt collection program that stops cigarette filters from washing into the bay through storm drains
- Initiated Plastic Pollution Solutions to work with local businesses to stop using single-use plastics
- Maintained the Little River Community Trail, installing new bog bridges, cleaning up damage from several storms and removing invasive species from the trail corridor
- Provided leadership for the Waldo County Climate Action Coalition, a group of organizations working on environmental issues, organized by the Belfast Free Library
- Organized a team to collect roadside trash and cigarette butts on the “Keep Belfast Beautiful” community clean-up day in May
- Created a yearly “Walk and Roll,” on the Harbor Walk that is accessible to people with disabilities to encourage broader participation in stewardship of the environment

Brought People Together to Enjoy Our Beautiful Environment

- Led nine bird walks/paddles for Bird Week in May
- Organized the Belfast Harbor Bird Watch from the Belfast Footbridge held monthly in winter
- Led 18 walks, hikes and paddles



Involved Citizens in Researching Local Issues that Affect Belfast Bay



- Trained 18 volunteer monitors and expanded water quality monitoring to five sites in Belfast Bay
- Continued monitoring storm surge sensors in Stockton Springs, Searsport, two sites in Belfast, Northport and Lincolnville harbors and reported data collection monthly

All of this work was made possible by hundreds of volunteer hours and grants from the Ferguson Foundation, the Schwartz Legacy, the New England Grassroots Environmental Fund, the Maine Community Foundation, First National Bank and BBWC members and private donors.

BBWC’s Annual Report is available upon request. For more information, come to the BBWC Annual Meeting, Thursday, February 20, 6:00 - 8:00 pm, in the Abbott Room of the Belfast Free Library or call Ann Kennedy - 410-530-5151.

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BBWC in the Schools: Involving the Next Generation

Merlin Program Off to a Flying Start at Troy Howard

by

Cloe Chunn, BBWC Board Member



Students crowd "The Walking Tree" on the Hemlock Trail at Troy Howard Middle School. Photo by Kathie Gass

In the 2023-2024 school year, volunteers from the Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition started the Merlin Program at Troy Howard Middle School. Students in the Program meet twice a month both during and after school time to learn about their natural environment. The program caught on and, this year, it is off to a great start with 26 students participating. Kathie Gass, an Extended Learning teacher in the Belfast District, leads the program at the school.

The group meets in the Outdoor Classroom at Troy Howard Middle School in all but inclement weather. The large campus of the school offers a variety of trails and habitats. September's program was an introductory smorgasbord of nature topics to come, including skulls and bones, wildflowers, deciduous trees, insects, fungi, "Fridge Phenology," and how to use binoculars and the Merlin birding app developed by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. October activities included designing covers for the journals being kept by students and their mentors, learning and drawing fungi, plant printing and hands-on study of insects with naturalist Lorenzo Forcella.

Merlin participants will study seasonal phenomena. They will learn to track animals in snow, explore vernal pools and streams in spring, and choose a plant or animal species to study and represent for the "Council of Beings." The year will culminate with an all-day field trip with bag lunches provided by Waldo County General Hospital. Last year's trip was to Sears Island.

BBWC volunteers include Cathryn Aiken, Cloe Chunn, Cathy Kemper, Meredith Coffin, Amy Kroll, Joel Krueger, Deb Lindstrom, Judy Walker and Sandy Wallace. Lavinia Welch, a sophomore at the Belfast Area High School, also volunteers as a mentor. The mentors feel that, as a bonus of volunteering, they have as much fun learning about nature as the students.

A grant from the Maine Community Foundation has enabled the purchase of journals, art materials, binoculars, guide books and hand lenses.



Black Fly Cloe Chunn and Rabbit Raleigh share their stories at last year's Council of Beings.

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Marine Institute at BAHS Engages Students in Exploring Belfast Bay

by

Felix Duggin, BAHS Senior, and the BMI Mariners Club

The Belfast Marine Institute (BMI) is a program in the Belfast Area High School in Belfast that offers nautical education for interested students. BMI offers a variety of marine-specific classes, such as a Marine Studies class that covers general oceanography, a Projects in Engineering class that educates students in all things engineering and allows them freedom and guidance to create their own inventions, and even a Sea Stories class that focuses on the literature of the ocean.



Students in the marine studies class take water quality measurements off the Belfast dock.

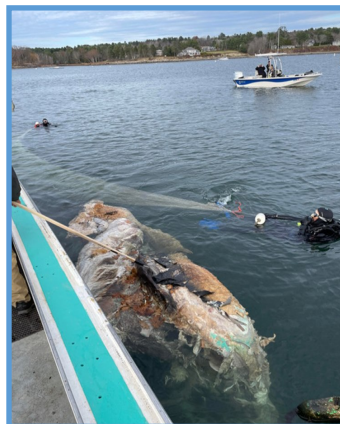
The most prominent and interesting thing about BMI, however, is the extracurricular activity it offers. The Mariners Club gives students the opportunity to participate in constructing, managing and harvesting a kelp farm. Students can experience marine technician work that includes configuring the new BMI motor boat, deploying a sensor buoy to detect water quality and collecting whale bones to be studied by the school.

Nearly all of these activities are student-led, which allows for some wonderful hands-on experiences. All in all, the Belfast Marine Institute is an excellent institution for students to develop both skills and knowledge, as well as a profound love of the ocean, enabling them to carry on Maine's seafaring legacy.

BBWC Board Member Dave Thomas helps to coordinate the program and facilitates interaction between Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition and the students. Last year, students analyzed and graphed data collected by the volunteers on BBWC's Water Quality Management Team. The Team is looking forward to working with them again this year.



Students in the Marine Archaeology class record observations of an old shipwreck in the Passagassawakeag River.



Scuba divers wrap a Minke whale carcass in netting to collect the bones for later study by students. In the background is the new BMI boat that was used to transport divers and materials to the site.



Vertebrae and ribs collected from the whale were assembled by students.

Photos by history teacher Charles Lagerbom and science teacher Genevieve Black, who co-teach the Marine Studies class.

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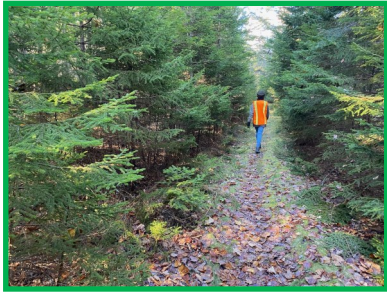
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Sears Island Update

by Jeff Shula and Lisa Pohlmann



Sears Island, a 941 acre island off the coast of Searsport, is being proposed by the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) as a hub for developing and launching offshore wind turbines. MDOT is proposing to build a wind port of offshore wind turbines on 100 acres of the island parcel it already owns.

If the wind port is built, 45 acres of upland will be cleared, graded, and compacted. Over one million cubic yards of earth will be removed. Plus, more than 17 acres in marine habitat acres will be filled with over 800,000 cubic yards of harvested soil. This will destroy acres of eelgrass meadows, which is an essential fish habitat, and shellfish beds. About one-third of the island could be changed forever.

However, the State's plans for a wind port on Sears Island have taken a hit with several recent developments that the Maine Department of Transportation will have to overcome for the project to come to fruition.

First, in October, the State was turned down on its application for \$456 million in federal funding for design and permitting of the port.

Then, in early November, contractors showed up to begin clearing access roads to test boring sites -- a public relations faux pas for MDOT, since irate citizens' organizations weren't notified before the work began.



A timber harvester positioned at an entry point to the forest. 12 - 15 foot pathways were cut to access the site.



Large timber mats are used when heavy machinery crosses a stream or wetland area.

An October 29 auction of wind leases in the Gulf of Maine only brought two bidders.

And, as if that weren't enough, there was the election of Donald Trump. "Trump has said multiple times he will kill offshore wind on day one," said Rolf Olsen, vice-president of Friends of Sears Island, "so the cards are stacked against the project, whether on Mack Point or Sears Island."

MDOT, for its part, is forging ahead. Speaking on NewsCenter Maine in November, Director of Communications Paul Merrill said, "The State of Maine continues to strongly believe that offshore wind presents a transformational opportunity to strengthen our economy, create good paying jobs, and embrace clean energy from our own backyard."

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MDOT came in for heavy criticism from activist groups who were caught flat-footed by the tree clearing in November. "We didn't learn about it until after the work had begun," said Olsen, who received a text from a concerned citizen saying, "What's going on?" Olsen immediately drove to the island to investigate. He found contractors working with heavy equipment to build 12- to 14-foot wide access roads to seven locations for test bores.



One of the test boring sites which are cleared to a 25 foot radius around the drilling location.

The surprise tree work and drilling came in contrast to preliminary work in 2022 when the state gave plenty of notice, as well as diagrams, of work to be done. Citizens groups, including Alliance for Sears Island, Islesboro Islands Trust, Campaign to Protect Sears Island, and Friends of Sears Island, said the lack of knowledge of the more recent work affected the State's credibility with the public. MDOT blamed the lack of communication on a key staffer being out sick at the time.

The failure to secure the \$465 million federal grant represents a big chunk of the total project cost, said Olsen. Still, MDOT Commissioner Bruce Van Note vowed the State will pursue other funding options, and it was awaiting word on another \$15 million for design and permitting.

The lackluster response to the lease auction by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management saw just two bids totaling \$22 million on eight available leases offshore. Olsen noted that the State also is having trouble finding a buyer for power that will be generated by up to 12 floating turbines in a University of Maine research array.

In a local legislator's attempt to preserve the island, Rep. Reagan Paul, a Republican from District 37 (Winterport, Frankfort, Stockton Springs, Searsport), is trying to revive a bill that was rejected by the Legislative Council last session. Paul was requesting reconsideration in November of LD 2781, "An Act to Protect the Cultural Resources and Historical Heritage of Sears Island in Searsport." Paul called Sears Island a "national treasure" as the largest undeveloped causeway-accessible island on the East Coast.

The island is "rich with indigenous Wabanaki history and American history from the Revolutionary War," said Paul in a letter to Legislative Council chair Troy Jackson. Its intact ecosystems "are better for carbon reduction than projects like these..." she wrote. Paul was still looking for co-sponsors of the bill in late November.

It all adds up to a tougher road, though certainly no death knell, for the wind port, designated for Sears Island instead of Mack Point last February in an announcement by Gov. Janet Mills. Due to the sheer size and complexity of the project, Olsen said, "I've always thought this could collapse on itself."

Photos by Rolf Olsen



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Sharing What She Knows

by Ann Kennedy

If you know BBWC Board member Cloe Chunn, you know three things about her. The first is that she possesses an extraordinary amount of knowledge about our environment. If you've been on a BBWC Outing with her, you have experienced it first-hand.

The second thing you will know about Cloe is how generous she is with her time and energy, working to bring everyone into the Maine woods and onto its rivers to appreciate their beauty. As a founding member of BBWC, she has contributed thousands of hours establishing, organizing and leading natural literacy programs and outings.

The third thing to know about Cloe is how passionate she is about teaching future generations to become stewards of the environment. She has taught experiential education and outdoor literacy for 30 years and has started a number of environmental literacy programs for people of all ages, including the BBWC's Penobscot Bay Stewards Program, BBWC's natural literacy programs in area schools, and the Merlin program at Troy Howard Middle School.



Hugging a grandmother Red Oak



Cloe helps students identify tiny insects collected in a net swept through the grass.

This past year, Cloe has been teaching what she knows to a group of 14 local adults who are training to lead nature walks around the area. The "Be a Naturalist" course consisted of a year of one or more half-day field trips each month, plus an evening class in most months. Three of the participants in the class are teachers who will then pass on what they learned to their students.

Course work changed with the seasons. January and February's lessons included mammal tracks, scat and skulls, progressing through vernal pools, stream macroinvertebrates, and other wetlands in early spring. Summer brought study of the intertidal zone, and all the insects, birds and plants that inhabit our environment. In fall, attention turned to animal migrations, further study of trees and, later, to winter twigs and weeds, mosses and lichens, and back to tracking in snow.

Congratulations to these new naturalists! We look forward to being led on informative and interesting walks by them in the future. Meanwhile, join Cloe on one of our Outings listed on page 9.



Pictured left to right: Killian Brayson, Chantal Brouillard, Nicole Caruso, Margo Davis, Judy Walker, Nancy Tyndall, Nelle Davis, Kathie Gass, Ben Rosenthal. Not pictured: Kiernan Sellers, Tish Manning, Lauren Gjessing, Emily Berry, Judy Heining

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Winter Outings



Saturday, January 18, 10:00 am-12:00 noon - Trees and Tracks of Belfast City Park Arboretum

Join us to explore winter in our city park. Discover which wild animals are city dwellers in the cold winter months and how to identify trees in their beautiful winter form. We will meet at the front gate of City Park at 10:00.

Saturday, February 15, 10:00 am-12:00 noon - Cross Country Ski or Snowshoe Adventure

Join us at the farm of Cloe Chunn and David Thanhauser, 210 Oak Hill Road in Swanville. Don your skis or snowshoes (or hiking boots if there's no snow) and explore the beautiful woods and field trails. Bring a bag lunch and something warm to drink and gather around a campfire. Or, just come at noon for the campfire and lunch.



Saturday, March 22, 10:00 am-12:00 noon - Geology Walk Along the East Belfast Shoreline

Join us and geologist Chris Mattson to explore the interesting bedrock on the eastern shoreline of our river and learn how it came to be. Meet at the Stephenson Lane Rangeway, starting from the parking lot of the former Wentworth Event Center in East Belfast. Wear sturdy shoes and dress warmly.

For more information or in questionable weather, call Cloe at 207-338-1147 (landline - no texts)

Winter Birding on the Footbridge

Winter is the best time to observe ducks and shore birds from the Belfast footbridge. Many northern species fly south to Belfast where they can find food in open water.

On the second Saturday of each winter month from 8:30-10:00 am, join Ron Harrell and Gary Gulezian who, for the 12th year, will set up their telescopes and be on hand to identify birds. Dress warmly, bring your binoculars, and join us!

January 11 February 8 March 8

Save These Dates!

- Saturday, April 19 - Earth Day Paddle on the Goose River
- Sunday, April 20 - Earth Day Hike on the Hills to Sea Trail
- May 10-17 - Cathy Morgan Bird Week
- Saturday, May 31, 10:00-2:00 - Walk and Roll for Conservation!

Winter Programs

BBWC Annual Meeting & Volunteer Appreciation

Thursday, February 20

6:00 pm

Abbott Room of the Belfast Free Library

Join us to celebrate this year's achievements and set next year's goals.

Thursday, March 18, 6:30 pm - Scallop Farming in Penobscot Bay



Andrew and Samantha Peters founded Vertical Bay in 2018 as a model for scallop farming in Maine. Andrew will discuss how their scallops are grown in the nutrient-rich waters of the Penobscot Bay, the “ear-hanging” method of farming he uses, how he has benefitted from the work of research institutions in Maine and the challenges and opportunities scallop farming presents.

This program is jointly sponsored by Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition, the Belfast Free Library and Come Boating. It will be held in the Abbott Room of the Belfast Free Library with a ZOOM option.

Call for Submissions- Art Depicting Birds

The Belfast Free Library is seeking submissions for an exhibit of art depicting birds for an exhibit in the Kramer Gallery in May of 2025, in conjunction with the Cathy Morgan Bird Week. Submissions can include photographs, paintings, prints, sculpture, fiber arts and poetry. Submissions should be appropriately framed. Priority will be given to birds that inhabit our region. Submissions are due by March 14, 2025. Submissions should be sent to Brenda Harrington at bharrington@belfastlibrary.org.

Reentry Center Volunteers Join in “Butts Be Gone” Efforts



In August, volunteers from the Maine Coastal Regional Reentry Center joined with BBWC's Butts Be Gone Committee to tackle the problem of cigarette butt litter in Belfast. Each month, their crew will empty the 15 cigarette disposal units placed around the city and then send the collected butts to Terracycle for transformation into industrial pallets. Over a trillion cigarette butts are littered each year around the world. Each cigarette filter contains dozens of hazardous materials, including arsenic, pesticides and micro-plastics. Collecting and properly disposing the cigarette butts littering our streets prevents these toxic timebombs from poisoning our bay and contaminating our soil. Many thanks to the Reentry Center for joining in this important task. The Butts Be Gone Committee is always looking for other volunteers to help with this environmentally important work. If interested, please contact Kate Hanson, katehanson207@gmail.com.

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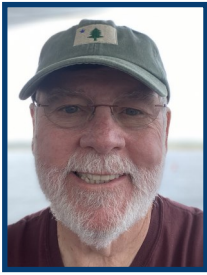
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A Message from Our Board

by Greg Biddinger, President



2025 promises to be an exciting year for the Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition. Our New Year's resolutions include making a concerted effort to improve our communications with our membership and more broadly with the surrounding community and to create a strategic focus for our efforts.

Toward the first resolution, we have created a communications improvement initiative led by Ann Kennedy with critical assistance from Board members Gene Randall, Noah Gilchrist and Joy Bowles and volunteers Meg Haskell, Katie McDonald, Lee Reilly, Tyrone Townsend and Nancy Trimper. This communications workgroup is evaluating how to redesign our website so that it is more valuable to our membership and the public. Additionally, they are working to brush the dust off of our social media platforms and establish a presence on newer outlets. Our goal is to communicate in a more effective way and with greater speed.

Our second resolution is to create a strategic plan that will help us align our resources toward what is most important to the watershed and the communities that share its natural resources. A strategic planning work group has been formed, led by Linda Munroe, Diana Post and Lee Reilly, alumni of the Penobscot Bay Stewards class of 2024.

Some of you may be tapped for your opinions in surveys and interviews. If you are contacted, we hope you will take the time to respond with your thoughts on how BBWC can be a more valuable and effective organization.

All this effort to determine what BBWC does in the future doesn't mean we will abandon what we do best right now - our outings and programs, our great natural literacy work with our local schools and our signature Pen Bay Stewards Program - but it may mean we seek out more opportunities to collaborate with other like-minded organizations as we explore new opportunities. Keep an eye out for the results of these efforts and, as always, if you want to get involved, please get in touch.

BBWC Board Meetings are open to the public. They are held on the 3rd Thursday of each month from 4:00-5:30 pm in the Abbott Room of the Belfast Free Library. We welcome your attendance and interest.

Thursday, January 16

Thursday, February 20

Thursday, March 20

Join us for our Annual Meeting - Thursday, February 20, 6:00-8:00pm

BBWC Committees & Contact Information:

BBWC Board: Greg Biddinger - gbiddi@gmail.com

Community Engagement Committee: Don Trites - dgrites@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, Jacquie Gage - jacquie.gage@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 - joy.bowles@gmail.com

Earth Day/Arbor Day: Pat Gladding - patricia.gladding@gmail.com

Penobscot Bay Stewards 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.

Butts Be Gone Coordinator: Help us find partners in our communities to work with us on ridding our streets of toxic cigarette butts.

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

BBWC Board of Directors

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 Gene Randall, Treasurer
 Kate Hanson, Secretary
 Cloe Chunn
 Noah Gilchrist
 Pat Gladding
 Josh Goldstein
 Ann Kennedy
 Kris Shula
 Dave Thomas
 John Tipping
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Jenni Judkins,
 Natural Literacy Educator
 Parker Richardson, Publicity and
 Website

Newsletter Committee

Ann Kennedy, Editor
 Cloe Chunn
 Jennifer Craig
 Meg Haskell
 Katie McDonald
 Lisa Pohlmann
 Jeff Shula

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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
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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, 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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