Merrymeeting News

Summer 2025 Vol. XXXV No. 3

The Newsletter of Friends of Merrymeeting Bay • PO Box 233 • Richmond Maine 04357 • 207-666-1118 • www.fomb.org

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay (FOMB) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit 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 in our online edition at www.fomb.org

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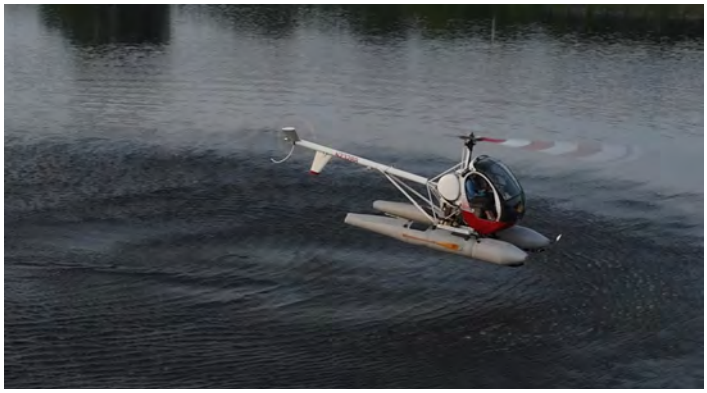
Upgrading the Upper Lower Androscoggin

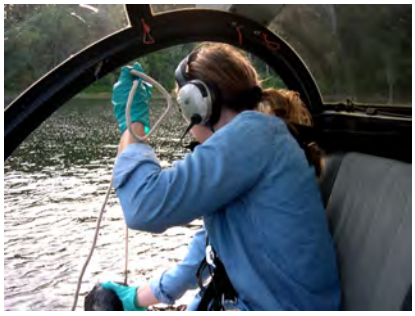
In 2022–2023, after many years of data gathering and reclassification attempts, FOMB used our water quality data to successfully upgrade state classification of the lower Androscoggin River from Class C to Class B, a much higher standard. The upgraded section runs from Worumbo dam in Lisbon Falls to Merrymeeting Bay. That section had been classified as Class C for many years, even though its actual quality met the Class B standard. When actual quality surpasses that of the classification this leaves room to pollute while the discharger continues to comply with the existing but lower standard.

There is a great deal of interest in extending the upgrade further up river from Lisbon Falls to Gulf Island Pond (GIP). In the most recent DEP nomination request for upgrades, our partners at Grow L+A submitted a proposal to bring this section from Class C to Class B. The DEP does not support this. Existing but limited water quality data for the section mostly indicate Class B but are somewhat sporadic.



Departing site A3.
Photo: Aquaterra Films

Last year we looked at the possibility of using a helicopter with amphibious floats as a means to gather comprehensive data in support of the upgrade with limited personnel. We did a trial flight in 2024 and were very successful at sampling a longitudinal profile of 10 sites from Lisbon Falls into GIP with two people in about 1½ hours. In light of this, the Merrymeeting Bay Chapter of Trout Unlimited and FOMB have split the cost of six flights this year, one in June, two each in July and August, and one in September (our focus is on hot and dry worst-case conditions) in an effort to provide the most comprehensive data to date on this section to back up the proposal, if supported by our findings.



Hannah grabs bacteria sample.
Photo:
Point of View Helicopter Services

As I write this on 8/28, our results so far, with five of six flights completed, have been outstanding, with all stations for each sampling flight (55 samples to date including replicates) easily meeting **Class B standards**. For Class B, dissolved oxygen (DO) must have a minimum geometric mean of **7 parts per million** (ppm) and ***E. coli*** must not exceed a geometric mean of **64 colonies/100 ml** over a 90 day period.

So far, combined geometric mean station results from Lisbon Falls to GIP are: **7.8 for DO and 17.3 for *E. coli*.**

The Board of Environmental Protection will hold a public hearing October 16 on all classification proposals and some other proposed changes to statutory language.

Ed Friedman

The Freight Train

Back when I started at the Department of Marine Resources, we got our broodstock alewives from below Edwards dam at head tide in Augusta. We'd vacuum the fish out of the Kennebec River with a pump into a tank, sort them for species (alewives only) from the tank, and then count them into watered and waiting stocking trucks. We could carry 1,500 fish in a tank.

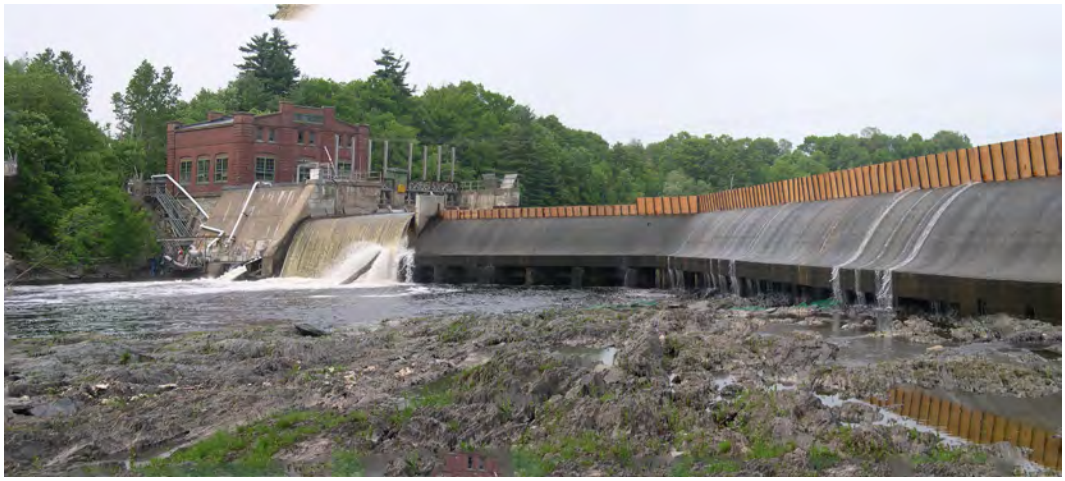
We'd haul the alewives in stocking trucks up to the Sebasticook River basin and stock those fish out into Unity Pond, Sebasticook Lake, Pleasant Pond, Pattee Pond, Lovejoy Pond, Plymouth Pond, and Douglas Pond. Operations began in May and ran through June, seven days a week until the fish stopped coming. On a good year we could move 60,000 fish. That amounted to 50–70 trips in the trucks. Not all loads were 1,500 fish. It was a lot of driving and a lot of fun.

In 1999, the Edwards dam was decommissioned and removed from the Kennebec. At the stroke of noon on July 1, an excavator perched on the crest of the dam dug deep and the river was freed for the first time since 1837. The first FERC licensed dam ordered removed by FERC in the United States. It was a remarkable event. Governor King spoke, as well as the Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbit.

Celebration complete, I returned to the pump on the powerhouse side of the river and observed as the excavator deepened the breach. After a few hours, a massive torrent of water was tearing through the hole in the dam. The roar of flowing water was deafening. As I watched, a fish appeared, as if by magic. It was a fast fish, and it attempted to ascend the raging cataract. About halfway up, the fish ran out of steam and tumbled back downstream. No question in my mind it was an American shad.

Over the next two months the Edwards dam was plucked from the river piece by piece. Above the dam the former impoundment receded revealing the river's original form. So ended the Edwards dam era.

The next year we moved stocking operations to Ft. Halifax, the lowest dam on the Sebasticook River, in Winslow, Maine. The pump was reinstalled, and we pretty much repeated what we had been doing at Edwards dam, but 17 miles further upriver and that much closer to the target ponds. The water was tighter here. The pump more effective. We moved more fish. These operations continued at Ft. Halifax for another 8 years.



Ft. Halifax dam, before removal.
Photo: Ed Friedman

Meanwhile, further up-basin new fish passages and dam removals were proceeding. Guilford dam in Newport was removed and a "pool and chute" fishway was installed at the outlet of Sebasticook Lake. Plymouth Pond and Stetson Pond both got Alaskan steep-pass fishways. Benton Falls dam installed a fish lift. Burnham dam installed a fish lift.

In 2007 and 2008, we not only filled stocking trucks with fish we also continuously counted fish over Ft. Halifax dam and released those fish up-river to test the newly installed fish lifts at Benton and Burnham, as well as those passages at Sebasticook Lake and Plymouth and Pleasant Ponds. Those were long days. We'd take turns bailing fish and counting fish into a flume that plunged into the headpond—half a million fish a year. Great work if you can get it!

Then in 2008, the long-serving Ft. Halifax dam was removed after exactly 100 years of service. One of the first dams built in the state that was meant to produce electricity, not shaft horsepower. The removal of Ft. Halifax allowed sea-run fish to access historical habitat in the Sebasticook basin for the first time in a long time.

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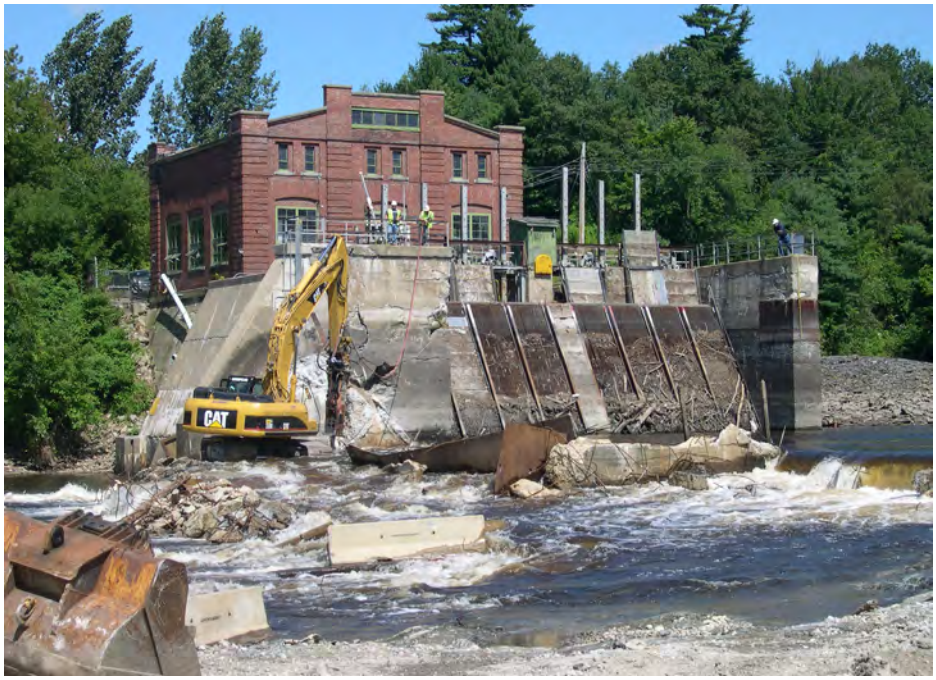
The Freight Train, continued from page 2



Ft. Halifax dam removal.
Photo: Ed Friedman

In 2009, I checked below Box Mill Dam, the first upstream barrier (of six) on China Lake's Outlet Stream. Outlet Stream winds its way north from its outlet at China Lake to its mouth in the Sebasticook about a mile upstream of Ft. Halifax. Wouldn't you know it, there were alewives below Box Mill Dam! Not just a few either. Thousands of fish pushed headlong against the falls at Box Mill with nowhere to go.

I had started public outreach on China Lake in 2001. It was not a popular idea. Alewives were suspect and blamed for any number of calamities, from water quality declines to sport fishery collapse. I got one of the hardest questions in a meeting with the China Lake Association. It caught me off guard. "If we ask you to go away and never come back, will you?"

China Lake at 4,000 acres is a big chunk of water. The river herring run to China Lake was killed off in the mid to late 18th century, a victim of intense colonial land development and industry. The last known record of any fish in Outlet Stream came in 1783 in the form of a petition to the General Court of Massachusetts to *avoid* installation of fish passage, required by law even then. It turns out the local citizenry was not happy with the prospect of breaching all the dams on Outlet Stream, even if only during the river herring run and in a limited way just to provide fish passage. Plus, why should we have to? There haven't been any fish here for years! So they didn't. Those fish passage laws were pesky and fairly well ignored in most cases.

In 2014, Maine Rivers held a "State of the Kennebec River" symposium at the former Hathaway Shirt factory in Waterville, Maine and also the site of Lockwood dam. Now the lowest dam on the Kennebec River. Quite a few people came to speak. The big hydro interests didn't have much to say, but it was plain that a respectable number of people were very interested in further restoration efforts within the basin.

A partnership was formed. Maine Rivers, Marine Resources, and many others continued a push for opening up China Lake. There were endless meetings with stakeholders, partners, federal agencies, state agencies, property owners, towns, private landowners, business associations, conservation commissions, and more. We started to gain traction. A couple of dams were purchased with the "right to remove" as part of the sale. Funds were raised, engineers were hired, and studies were done. Lots of studies. We even counted pebbles. No kidding. Flows were calculated in the stream. Sediments were studied for contaminants. Sediment volumes were calculated. Multiple options were studied for all six dams.

In the end, we removed three of those dams and installed Denil-type fish passages in the three remaining dams. Those three fish passages were designed to be the best they could possibly be, and I can tell you they work quite well. The first year of open fish passage we counted 837,000 fish coming into China Lake. We had calculated a run of a million fish into the lake. Those numbers were based on a series of recruitment studies on Damariscotta Lake. In 2023, we counted 2.7 million fish; in 2024 3.2 million fish! A lot of fish. Piles of fish. Miles of fish.

This past season the Sebasticook River saw a run of well over 11,000,000 fish. The sheer number of fish at Benton Falls is enough to take your breath away. The Benton Falls fish lift moved in excess of 9,000,000 fish into historically accessible habitat upstream. The fish push so hard in their run up stream that they physically bulge the water up feet at a time. Hundreds of thousands of fish per day, day after day, lift after lift. The response from the local wildlife has been

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R. I. P.

R.I.P. (Rest in Peace), here refers to both the ever-declining historic populations of native fishery that have inhabited the Gulf of Maine watershed, as commemorated in an artwork installation of headstones by artist Monica Chau, and also to several stalwart Friends of Merrymeeting Bay members who have recently passed to the great beyond, but not without remembering FOMB in their wills or memorial wishes. You, too, can do this. The memories of those departed FOMB members live on in those of us who loved them.

Commemorating declining native fisheries through art

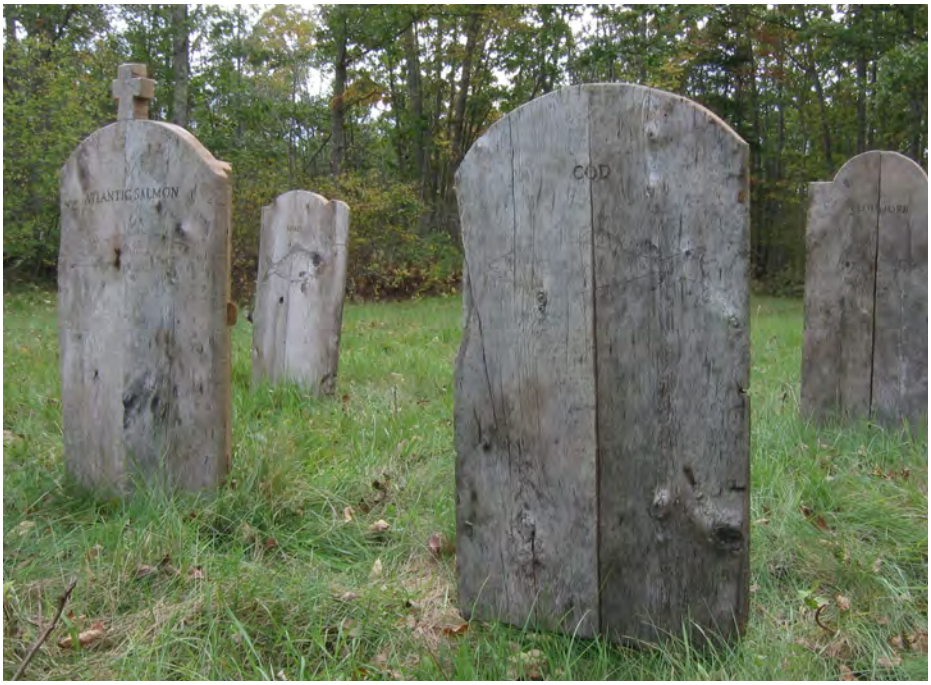

Photo: Ed Friedman

Monica's Chau's headstones were created using reclaimed barn wood, which makes an iconic reference to Maine's agricultural and economic history.

Each headstone is marked with a wood-burned image dedicated to a particular endangered, threatened, or extinct fish. Some fish are easily identified—Atlantic salmon, halibut, cod, or shortnose sturgeon—while others from our recent past are vague recollections (shad, flounder, or bluefish).

For Chau, who exhibited her work at the Portland Museum of Art, retracing the past is a recurrent theme. It is the gaps formed between history and memory or between factual events and our recollections that she attempts to disclose.

Remembering lost friends

KD Vitelli

Born on D-Day, June 6, 1944 in California, Karen Donne (KD) Vitelli was the first of five children of James R. and Alice (Carter) Vitelli of Bowdoinham. She attended schools in Easton, PA. and graduated from the College of Wooster, Ohio, in 1966, having spent her junior year in the College Year in Athens program. KD went on to study archaeology at the University of Pennsylvania. She received her PhD in 1974 and taught first at the University of Maryland, later joining the faculty of the Program in Classical Archaeology at Indiana University, becoming Chair in 1987. KD taught popular experimental pottery courses, both in the U.S. and Greece, prompting her students to ask larger questions about gender roles, the division of labor in early societies, specialization, and household production.

As a professor of archaeology, KD was the author of many scholarly publications and monographs on her research in Greek Neolithic pottery. In addition, she contributed and edited columns in the *Journal of Field Archaeology* (1976–1983) and later edited a book, *Archaeological Ethics*, geared towards a broader audience to highlight the impacts that looting and irresponsible collecting practices have on the loss of cultural heritage. Most recently, she published a book entitled *Do I Really Want to be an Archaeologist? Letters from the Field, 1968–1974,* in which letters sent home convey not only her early ambivalence about a career in archaeology, but also shine a light on a time of social and political upheaval in Greece.

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R.I.P, continued from page 4

Vitelli retired from teaching in 2005 and moved with her husband Reg to Dresden, Maine, to be closer to her family. KD was an active community member, participating in and often organizing the Dresden Conservation Commission, the annual Bridge Academy Library plant sale, the Wiscasset Garden Club, and helping to maintain the gardens at the Pownalborough Courthouse and the Nickels-Sortwell house in Wiscasset. KD developed a loyal fan club as the monthly columnist of "Seen in Dresden", reporting on local natural history sightings and events with contributions from other community members. She was an avid gardener and enjoyed the diverse bird life that frequented her neighborhood. KD passed away September 12, 2023 at her home in Dresden. FOMB received a sizeable bequest from KD for which we are very grateful.

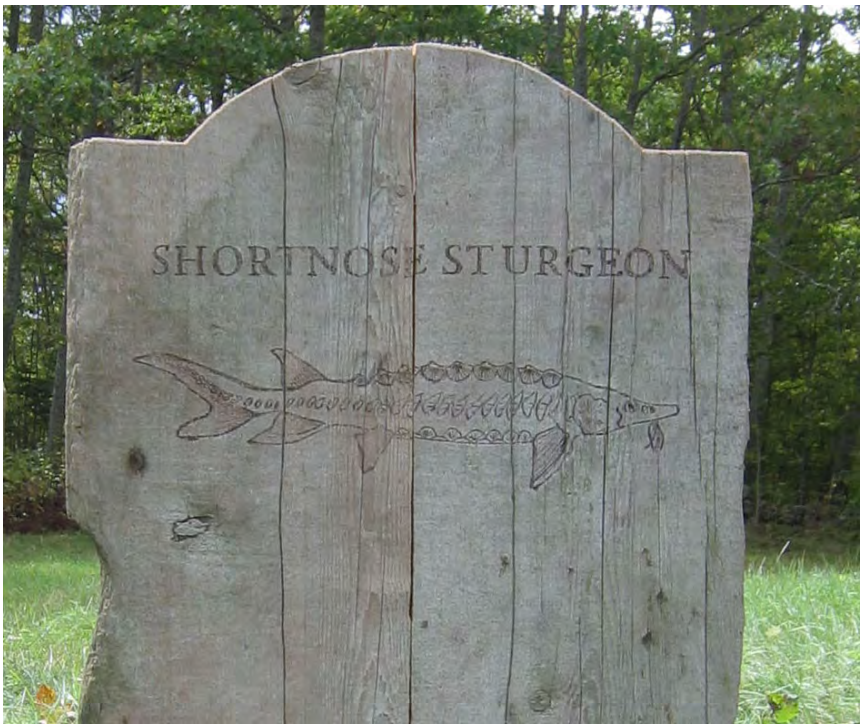


Photo: Ed Friedman

Ruth Innes

Ruth Hester Craig Innes, long-time FOMB member and water quality laboratory volunteer died in her sleep August 27, 2021 in Brunswick at the age of 92. Born June 28, 1929 in her beloved St. George, New Brunswick, Canada, Ruth lived independently in her house in Bath, right up until July 5, when she was injured in her home and declined swiftly until her passing. The younger of two daughters of Adeline Williamson and Lawrence Craig, Ruth always treasured memories of running in the fields and woods of her parents' property, helping tend chickens, their horse and occasional milking cow, the family dog Bruce, learning to skate on nearby ponds and creeks, walking back and forth the mile to school, summers housekeeping on an historic island (Ministers) isolated twice daily by the Bay of Fundy's famously high tides, and learning piano from her mother and a succession of teachers well into her 20s.

Ruth graduated from Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, in May 1950. From there, she moved to a technical assistant position at the National Research Laboratory in Ottawa, Ontario. In 1951, she met Keith Innes at the National Laboratory. Ruth and Keith were married August 20, 1952.

From Ottawa, Ruth moved with Keith to his first teaching position at the University of Oklahoma in Norman in the fall of 1953, and then to Nashville in 1954. Ruth and Keith's two sons were born there, in 1956 and 1958. Ruth remained in Nashville until 1968, providing quality education and rearing for her children and instilling in them a love for music and the outdoors. Ruth led the move from Nashville to Binghamton, N.Y., where Keith held a professorship in the State University system until his retirement in 1990. She continued to support her family's development through middle school, high school, and college years.

Also notable across the years were the many challenges Ruth faced and overcame: living far from New Brunswick and her family; contracting tuberculosis in Nashville; the moves and continuing deferral of her own career goals; Keith's early onset of Alzheimer's disease just as retirement years approached; caring for Keith over the 10 years until his death in 2000; relocating and reestablishing her life on her own in Bath. There she loved volunteering to collect and process water quality samples from the Kennebec and other rivers for FOMB, while maintaining her house and her life as she chose, until her passing. Ruth generously remembered our research work in her will.

Continued on next page

R.I.P, continued from page 5

Grace Sherwood

Grace Price Sherwood died in a tragic accident on July 17, 2025 at the age of 46. Born in London and raised in New Jersey, she had made her home in Maine but resided in Havana, Cuba. Grace was, by any account, an extraordinary woman.

She lived the first few years of her life outside England´s capital city, in Wimbledon, before moving to Madison, New Jersey where she lived until the age of 12 when the family moved to Spring Lake, NJ. After graduating high school, Grace attended Colby College in Waterville, Maine where she thrived not only as a student but also as a rower, becoming captain of Colby´s crew team before graduating in 2001.

She married in 2003 and settled with her husband, Dave Sherwood, in a duck hunter's cottage on the shores of tranquil Merrymeeting Bay in Bowdoinham, Maine. She loved nothing more than to cook for friends and family in the kitchen there, watching the ducks, eagles and osprey from a spectacular perch over the Bay.

Photo: Ed Friedman

She soon took a job at L.L. Bean, where she rose quickly through the ranks to become director of its raw materials sourcing department. Grace traveled the world, visiting factories and making friends far and wide, from China and South Korea to India, Portugal, Mexico, and Hong Kong. Together with Dave, a journalist, she relocated to San Jose, Costa Rica, in 2006, where L.L. Bean also had offices. There, her already accomplished career and love for travel flourished as she visited countries throughout Latin America for work and pleasure.

Grace was her name, but also her nature. She moved effortlessly between countries, cultures, work environments, and age groups, gifted with the ability to make friends wherever she traveled, worked, or lived. She rarely spoke of herself. Her friends and family always came first. She never judged or criticized, preferring compassion, positivity, and understanding. She was as dependable as the sunrise.

She realized a dream of becoming a mother when her daughter, Liliana Virginia, was born in 2014, followed by her son, Andrew David, in 2017. Opting to spend every minute with her children during their youth, she put aside a successful career and moved to Santiago, Chile, where her husband worked for the Reuters News agency. She raised Lily and Andy in the sunshine-filled parks of that South American city, exploring Patagonia and the Andes Mountains with her family and making friends at every turn. Later, the family moved to Havana, Cuba, where they lived in a 1940s home near La Puntilla, in Miramar, just outside the city. The house was a revolving door for Cuban friends of her family and children. She gave endlessly to her neighbors. Grace's civic-minded spirit prompted her to volunteer for several roles on the parent-teacher board at the International School of Havana, where her children thrived.

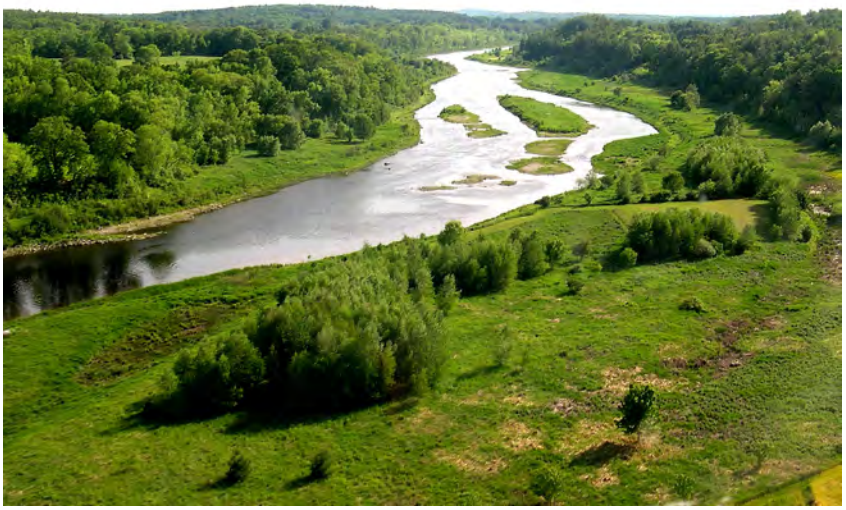
Grace was unflappable, unflinchingly kind and caring, an immense light, and a force for good in an otherwise turbulent world. Because she cared so much about the Bay, her family requested donations to FOMB in lieu of flowers, a kindness for which we thank both Grace and her family. She will be sorely missed by all who knew her.

Ed Friedman and published obituaries

The Freight Train, continued from page 3

stunning. We used to drop our gear to point at bald eagles. Now at Benton during the run there are bald eagles everywhere. Their cackles and screeches fill the air.

Quietly over the past 40 years, the Kennebec River has seen its river herring run go from a few hundred thousand fish to millions upon millions. Sturgeon can be seen leaping in downtown Waterville. Eels pass back up stream once again to grow in ponds that saw their secretive lives erased for centuries. We have come so far, but there is still much to do. Thousands of acres of historical habitat are still cut off—entire watersheds. We're going in the right direction. As with any freight train, it's a huge load for the long haul.



The Sebasticook River reborn.
Photo: Point of View Helicopter Services

Nate Gray

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 (Beavercreek, OH)
Becky Bowes, Secretary (Brunswick)
Phil Brzozowski (Brunswick)
Nate Gray (Vassalboro)

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Ed Friedman, Chair, 666-3372

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Membership Levels

☐ $1,000+ Sturgeon
☐ $750 American Eel
☐ $500 Wild Salmon
☐ $250 Striped Bass
☐ $100 Shad
☐ $50 Alewife
☐ $20 Smelt
☐ Other

Name _____

Address _____

Town/State/Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

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

☐ Renewal
☐ New Member
☐ Send information about volunteer opportunities
☐ I would like a FOMB duck logo sticker

Thanks to Rebecca Bowes for newsletter layout.

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Ancient Eel Weir Discovered on the Androscoggin

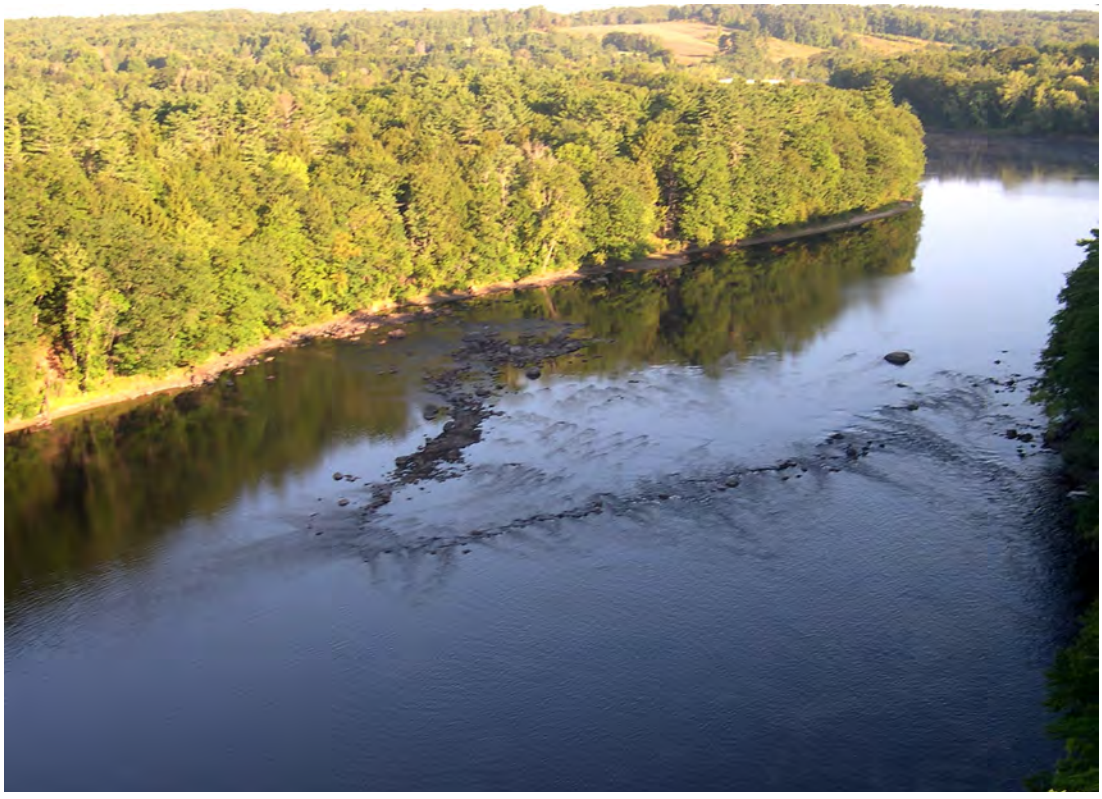

Photo: Point of View Helicopter Services

An unexpected benefit of flying during exceptionally low river flows was our discovery, or rediscovery, of this V-shaped, probably prehistoric, native American stone eel weir constructed from shore to shore on the Androscoggin. Maine Historic Preservation Commission has entered the weir into their database.