



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](http://www.fomb.org) at www.fomb.org

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Does the Dire Wolf Signal a Shift in Conservation Priorities?

The Department of the Interior's embrace of "de-extinction" technologies marks a troubling shift in federal conservation priorities—one that trades meaningful recovery for manufactured spectacle.

In a recent post, Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum celebrated biotech company Colossal Biosciences for "reviving" the dire wolf, framing the project as a conservation breakthrough. But the animals born in Colossal's lab are not true *Aenocyon dirus*. They're genetically modified gray wolves with a few cosmetic edits—engineered imitations named after pop culture characters, not scientifically restored predators. This is a marketing stunt, not a conservation success story.



Dire wolf, *Time Magazine* cover

More alarming than the science fiction is the policy shift it signals. Rather than invest in habitat protection, wildlife corridors, and regulation, the Department is promoting unproven biotech fantasies that distract from the real drivers of extinction: habitat loss, fossil fuel extraction, climate change, and the failure to enforce environmental laws.

The Endangered Species Act isn't broken because it protects too much. It struggles because it's underfunded, politicized, and undermined by rhetoric that treats species as commodities. Species remain listed because the threats that imperiled them—mining, grazing, development, poaching—remain unresolved.

De-extinction doesn't restore lost landscapes. It doesn't bring back extinct prey or repair broken ecological webs. It creates designer organisms destined for captivity—not conservation. To call that "recovery" cheapens the work of scientists, tribes, and conservationists fighting to protect what still exists. At Western Watersheds Project (and FOMB), we believe conservation must be science-driven, place-based, and precautionary. It means protecting wild landscapes and enforcing the laws that keep species from vanishing—not engineering animals for brand partnerships or political spin.

Wildlife doesn't need to be re-engineered. It needs to be respected.

Josh Osher

Public Policy Director, Western Watersheds Project www.westernwatersheds.org

Editor's note: To quote Rosalie Edge, subject of our [March 22, 2025 Winter Speaker](#) presentation:

"The time to protect a species is while it is still common."



Where There Were Wild Things!

It began like any other school visit to Box Mill fishway in Vassalboro. The school bus pulls in and the kids, teachers, and chaperones pile out. Only this time was different. This time there were 86 kids, 3 teachers, and 3 chaperones, plus the bus drivers. Then there was the amount of time I had to work with the kids. In this case 3 1/2 hours (10:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.), 2-plus hours more than I would typically spend on an educational presentation.

I have a routine working with the kids. I show them the new Denil fishway and explain how it works—the baffles slowing the water in the flume; the water curling around each baffle, slowing, backing up, and seeming to defy gravity. If you watch carefully, you can see the river herring surfing those hydraulic curls and easily ascending the fishway. It's really fascinating to watch. Then we discuss river herring and I show them how to identify blueback herring versus the alewife. I do a bio-sample of 25 fish.

Bio-samples are how we keep an eye on the health of the run. We can tell species, age, sex, weight, and length. We take the scales back to the wet lab in the state offices, clean them, and look at them under a microfiche reader. Using the reader, we can determine the age and whether the fish has spawned previously.

I show them a picture of a scale on the microfiche reader, and it looks like the rings from a tree stump. Those rings tell a lot.

Then I take the kids downstream a bit to see the sea lamprey building their nests on the bottom of the stream. You can readily see the nests because all the gravel and stone has been cleaned and moved to build a nest to lay the eggs in.

Then I explain that after spawning the adult lamprey all die. This is their last mission—to give all in procreation. The ultimate sacrifice. A sharp eye can spot the well camouflaged lamprey as they cling to a stone on the bottom. I'll explain their role in the ecosystem. You could spend an hour talking about lamprey and only touch on the basics. They're really cool.

I had the bio-sample stuff all set up: scale for weight, data sheet, scale envelopes, thermometer, dip-net, and 5-gallon buckets. I can occupy about six kids at a time doing the bio sample. I figured each set of kids would do one fish. Each fish takes 5 minutes, or sometimes more if the kids have trouble driving the net.



A day on the river is better than a day in school.
Photo: Ed Friedman

I guarantee that every one of those kids went home on the bus that day telling anyone who would listen that they caught an alewife by hand.

The weather was beautiful, simply perfect—sunny, warm, and the black flies were absent. We divided the kids into two teams, Red and Blue. I led the Red team upstream to the Ladd dam fishway about 400 yards away. I showed them the fishway and spoke briefly about the history of the site. I left them there with their teachers and chaperones and hustled back down to Box Mill.

I was gone at Ladd dam for 15 minutes. By the time I got back to Box Mill, most of the kids were down by the stream. Within a minute one of the kids had caught an alewife bare handed. Then another kid got in the water to have a better shot of catching a fish. Then another and another and so on until all but two were in. I moved downstream to be the catcher in case a kid got swept away.

The teachers were fine with it. I was fine with it. The kids were having an absolute blast. I was having a

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blast. They could have sat with me and listened to me drone on about restoration work and how to run a scale and how to fill out a data sheet. The kids might even remember it for a while. But I guarantee that every one of those kids went home on the bus that day telling anyone who would listen that they caught an alewife by hand. I also guarantee that they'll remember that field trip most likely as long as they live. They experienced those fish up close and personal, in the fish's environment; not a dead fish in a bucket but a live fish doing its best to not get caught by a kid!

The first hour flew by and then it was time for the Blue team to head to the Ladd dam and time for the Red team to come to Box Mill.

The two teams passed each other on the bridge above Box Mill. I could hear the conversation and see the Red team kids pick up their pace as they realized the Blue team had just spent the past hour frolicking first person with the fish in the stream.

There was zero hesitation. Red team all fairly flew into the water, and the gleeful screams of 6th graders filled the air.

I sat back and watched. For the next hour kids chased fish and fish fled for their lives. It was marvelous. Once again, the hour flew by and the kids all gathered at the buses to eat their lunches.

I returned several orphaned soaked socks. I munched on a sandwich with them and talked with the teachers. They had planned to spend the hour after lunch playing games and then board the buses for the ride back to school.

That did not happen.

One of the teachers approached me and asked if I could do the bio sample thing. So, after lunch 86 kids, 3 teachers, 2 bus drivers, and 3 chaperones all headed back down to the fishway, and I got all set to do the sample when *every kid went right back into the stream*. No one tried to stop them.

I wound up catching two fish from the fishway. One alewife and one blueback herring. I sacrificed them and did the bio-sample for the teachers, chaperones, and bus drivers. They all nodded appropriately at the right times as I showed them how to tell the difference between the fish. We weighed them, measured them, sexed them, and took their scales, all the while wishing we were in the water with those kids.



Alewives
Photo: Ed Friedman

Nate Gray

Editor's note: Outlet Stream flows 7 miles north, draining China Lake into the Sebasticook River, about a mile upstream from its junction with the Kennebec in Winslow. Over the last 5–10 years there has been a major effort, now complete, to remove three of the six dams on Outlet Stream and improve fish passage on the other three. Almost immediately, alewives have returned to the river and lake in large numbers, and aerial flush counts of bald eagles are now yielding over 100 birds gathering to dine on these sea-run river herring.

What Does LD 1234 Have to Do with FOMB Bay Day?

LD 1234 was a bill in the current legislative session to ban cell phone use in Maine schools “from bell to bell.” Unfortunately, it was amended in the Education & Cultural Affairs Committee into a Resolve, requiring school districts in Maine to simply have a comprehensive policy around cell phones in schools by August 2026, not necessarily a ban. The transformation from ban to Resolve was primarily due to concerns over loss of local control.

The concerns about cell phone use by children include potential harm to their mental and physical health, negative impacts on social skills and academic performance, and exposure to inappropriate content and cyberbullying. These concerns stem from evidence linking excessive screen time to anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and other health problems, including from radio frequency radiation, which penetrates skulls of children far more than adults.

Florida was the first state to pass a law regulating the use of cell phones in schools in 2023. Just 2 years later, more than half of all states have laws in place, with ten of these being total bans. Quite a few states have legislation pending and only Hawaii, Nevada, Wyoming, and Mississippi have no regulation or prospective legislation. A number of Maine

school districts have bans, including RSU 1 serving Bath.

Microwave Cellphone Effects Absorption in the Brain According to Age

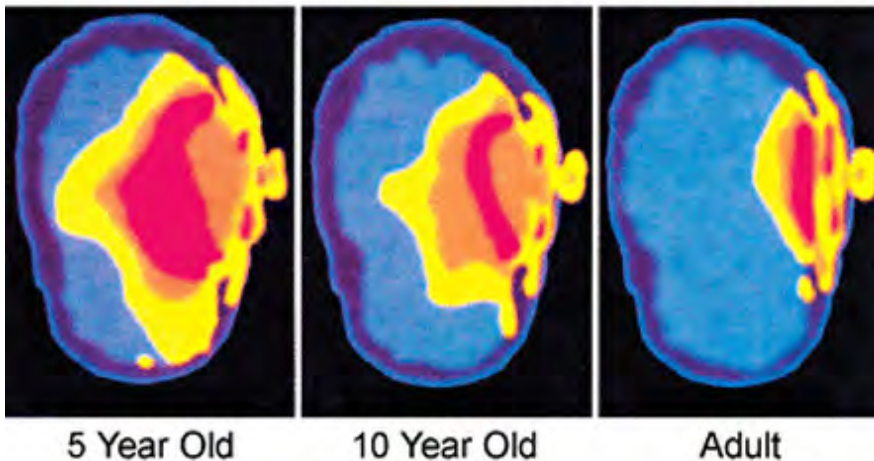


Image courtesy of Dr. Orn Gandhi, University of Utah, 1996, IEEE Publication

In a recent Portland Press Herald article, Morse High School Principal Eric Varney said the impact of an all-out cell phone ban has been quick and extremely positive, “*I’ve had teachers that have been in the business for 40 years say this is the single best thing, best policy change, they’ve seen in their 40 years.*”

Morse requires students to put their phone in a Yondr Pouch, a magnetically locking bag that the school provides for each student. Varney said student focus has been better this year, school suspensions have decreased by 50%, socialization has improved, teacher morale has risen, and rollout has been easier than expected.

The testimony for LD 1234 was overwhelmingly supportive, and there were also a number of great comments in response to the Press Herald article. Here’s one:

“I can’t believe that we are fighting to get cell phones out of kids’ hands during the school day. When I was a kid, I didn’t walk into school with a boom box, television, gaming system, and cordless phone—planning to spend two hours of my day using them! I was learning and socializing with my friends for an entire school day. Maine students today spend 2 HOURS of every school day on their phones....

Maine schools have a responsibility to protect our children, just as they do with bullying, concussions, and tobacco use. It is a GIFT to give all students 7 hours per day without the constant distractions and stress caused by phones in their hands. Students whose schools have already gone bell-to-bell love it once they realize they are no longer having to keep up with social media feeds. It’s one less thing for them to worry about!

I am so grateful that LD 1234 is bringing this issue to light, and we should all work toward a bell-to-bell ban in our districts. This is the easiest, more cost-effective way to give our students what they need to succeed.”

Recently a Maine coalition has formed to motivate and empower teens, parents, and educators in Maine to act collectively to free children and adolescents from a childhood spent largely alone on screens and instead promote independence, free play, and responsibility in the real world. Contact [Turn the Tide Coalition](#) to get involved. The Coalition notes:

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What Does LD 1234 Have to Do with FOMB Bay Day?, continued from page 4

“Teens and adolescents nationwide are in a mental health crisis. Major depressive episodes among American teens have more than doubled since 2010. Educational performance among teens across over 30 nations has also been in decline over the last decade. New research in the book [The Anxious Generation](#) suggests that the only available explanation for why this happened in many countries at the same time is that the ancient “play-based childhood” was replaced by the “phone-based childhood” in the early 2010s. Specifically, children and adolescents began to spend much more time on smart phones, social media, video games, and pornography, and much less time doing healthy activities, such as face-to-face interactions with friends and family, sleep, exercise, and reading books.”



Of course, any of you who have been FOMB members for a while know we started beating this drum over 25 years ago with our Spring and Fall Bay Days and our hands-on in-school visits. Our goal: to get kids away from their devices, get them learning outside, getting dirty and having fun, and in so doing, develop their love and stewardship for places of nature, whether the Bay while they are here now, or another place somewhere in their future.

Which brings us to Spring Bay Day, a sure cure for the “digital daze” LD 1234 takes aim at.

Spring Bay Day

Despite one of the coolest and wettest springs on record, May 13 at Chop Pt. School was a fabulous mild and sunny day. About 40 FOMB volunteers and Chunk the humpback whale provided workshops for and chaperoned 150 4th graders from Phippsburg, Bath, Woolwich, Chop Pt., and Pittston/Randolph schools.

Workshops were: Beach Seining, Watershed Modeling, Caring for Critters, Raptors, Nature Scene Investigations, Anadromous Fish Printing, Nests, Tree Walk, Archaeology, Fish Migration, Nonpoint Source Pollution, Wildlife Walk, Within the Whale, and Environmental Art.

Thanks to our guides and their helpers: Charlotte Agell, Jess Woodend, Regina McNamara, Steve Pelletier, Dick Brown, Rachele Spadafore, Becca Peixotto, Cyndie Lamoreau, Dana Cary, Cathy Reynolds, Betsy Steen, Nate Gray, Julia Kenmitz, Gracie Ballou, Kim Lato, Kathi McCue, Eric Ham, Kent Cooper, Bonnie Turek, Becky Bowes, Jason Bartlett, and Shannon Nelligan.

And our chaperones/helpers: Terry Porter, Sandy Scholar, Phil Brzozowski, Elise Straus-Bowers, Brian Bowers, Bill Good, Susan Chase, Tina Phillips, Dan Smith, Jane D-Yurko, Jane Frost, Teres Winter, Martin McDonough, Ray Hall, Greg Lucarelli, Ann Hartzler, and Jim Rea.

Thanks to: Maine Department of Marine Resources, Maine Department of Transportation, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Gulf of Maine Coastal Program, Marine Mammals of Maine, Within the Whale, Stantec, Jay Robbins, and Fred Koerber.

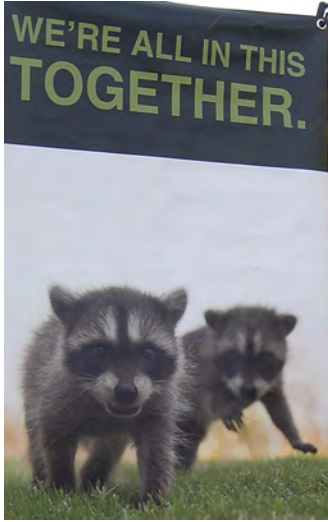
Special thanks to: Chop Pt. School for hosting us and Wild Oats for the tasty lunch wraps.

Please mark your calendars for Fall Bay Day, September 30 in Bowdoinham.

Spring Bay Day, 2025



Spring Bay Day, 2025, continued from page 6



Bay Day photos:
Ed Friedman
and
Becky Bowes

We're all in this together

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

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Membership Levels

- | | | |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000+ Sturgeon | <input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Striped Bass | <input type="checkbox"/> \$20 Smelt |
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☐ Renewal

☐ New Member

☐ Send information about volunteer opportunities

☐ I would like a FOMB duck logo sticker

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



Thanks to Rebecca Bowes for newsletter layout.



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Latest PFAS Testing Reveals Major BNAS Hot Spot

On April 23, in conjunction with the Brunswick Sewer District (BSD), FOMB continued our PFAS sampling of various BSD pump stations and infrastructure on the former base. We also sampled a number of other areas on the property. EPA **drinking water standards** have been **4 parts per trillion** (ppt or ng/l) for PFOS or PFOA, while the Maine standard has been **20 ppt** for 6 PFAS alone or in combination. The EPA recommendation for **surface water** continues in development, but **250 ppt** or less seems to be the level of concern for aquatic organisms. Of course, with the current administration, all environmental regulation is subject to downgrading.

In contrast with the standards above, some of our sampling yielded the following results in ppt:

Site	PFOS	6:2 FTS	Other	TOTAL
Hangar 6 pump station	325	549	913	1,787
Navy meter pump station	1,221	61	258	1,540
Fuel (surface water north of Blue Dog Doggie Day Care)	1,511	5	491	2,007
Hangar 4 separator pit (drains into the BSD system and Androscoggin River)	326,843	25,423	57,305	409,571



Sampling Hangar 4 pit on April 23, 2025.
Photo: Ed Friedman

We have notified the Navy and MRRA of our results and requested cleaning of the Hangar 4 pit.