



COASTAL RIVERS
CONSERVATION TRUST

RIVER TIDINGS

NEWSLETTER | WINTER 2020-2021





COASTAL RIVERS CONSERVATION TRUST

We are your community land trust, caring for the lands and waters you love in the Damariscotta-Pemaquid region.

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On the cover: Belted Kingfisher with a fresh catch — Photo by Jared Keyes

What a team with a bold vision can do

Letter from the Executive Director

It's no easy task to choose just a few stories to represent a year of accomplishments. Though 2020 required new ways of imagining and carrying out our work, it was busier – and more productive – than ever in many respects.

So as you read through these pages, please keep in mind that this newsletter represents just a sampling of the programs, initiatives, and conserved properties made possible by your support.

When you explore the new River Trail while learning about plans for its expansion (pp. 4-5), look over the shoulder of a volunteer as they take a water sample in your favorite pond (pp. 6-7), or join Hannah on a kayak tour of the North Branch of John's Bay (pp. 10-11), you are witnessing the benefits of your support on the ground.

I hope these stories also give a sense of the breadth and depth of partnerships behind each success: staff and volunteers, generous landowners, business supporters, local towns, state agencies, foundations, fellow non-profits, educators, members and donors. For me, they clearly show that a diverse team united around a bold vision can make a lasting impact on a pond, a river, an estuary, a community, and even a region.

Whatever role or roles you play, thank you for being on the team! As ever, I invite your questions, your ideas, and your concerns.

Warm wishes,

Steven Hufnagel



From top left: Angela DesVeaux, Hannah McGhee, Sarah Gladu, Darryn Kaymen, Joan Ray, Steven Hufnagel, and Jim Grenier. Missing from photo: you!

Your involvement with Coastal Rivers makes a difference in four key areas:



TRAILS & PUBLIC ACCESS

p. 4-5

Connecting people to the outdoors with

- Hiking trails
- The accessible River Trail, soon to be extended
- Working farms
- Access to lakes, ponds, rivers and estuaries for fishing, clamming, and recreation
- Places for bird & wildlife viewing



CLEAN WATER

p. 6-7

Ensuring healthy waterways and vibrant communities by enlisting citizen scientists, who

- Monitor fresh & salt water quality
- Maintain a water quality lab
- Help property owners become LakeSmart certified
- Tackle invasive aquatic species
- Monitor changes to shell middens
- Track horseshoe crab populations



EDUCATION

p. 8-9

Growing the community of people who care about our lands and waters with

- Workshops, classes, & guided hikes
- Camp Mummichog summer day camp
- Beachcombers' Rest Nature Center
- School programs & teacher trainings
- After-school program
- The Wabanaki program
- Midcoast Stewards program
- Oyster Gardening



WILD PLACES

p. 9-11

Protecting water quality and conserving places where wildlife can thrive, through

- Donated or purchased properties
- Committed stewardship of all conserved lands
- Voluntary landowner agreements, also called *conservation easements*

More “Trail for All”

For a land trust like Coastal Rivers, there are few projects as immediately and immensely gratifying as a new trail. Trails are our work made tangible. They offer a way for people to enter into a conserved area, to take in the beauty of their surroundings, deepen their appreciation of a place, and make it their own.

This is especially true for our accessible Rhoda and Leon Cohen River Trail in Damariscotta. Eight feet wide, very gently graded, and with a firm surface of fine crushed rock, the River Trail makes this stunning stretch of the upper river accessible to people with a range of abilities.

Visit the trail on a fine day and you will see what makes it special. You may meet parents pushing babies in strollers or see small children learning how to ride a bike, well away from traffic on the street. You may pass an elderly visitor chatting with her caregiver while she navigates the path with the help of a walker. You may even encounter a teacher from Great Salt Bay School leading students on a field trip to the shell midden or the school’s garden at Round Top Farm.

If you visit the trail, you will understand why we feel it’s so important to create more accessible trails just

▶ The planned trail will extend the existing River Trail by more than a mile, making it the longest accessible trail in the region. Four spurs off the trail will lead to views of ancient shell middens, Great Salt Bay, and Blackstone Point at Salt Bay Farm.

▼ Its width, smooth surface, and gentle grade make the River Trail accessible to almost everyone. Below, teachers from Great Salt Bay School walk from the school to a workshop at Coastal Rivers’ Round Top Farm in 2019.



like this one. And that is exactly what we are doing, starting with one that extends the existing Cohen River Trail from Coastal Rivers’ Round Top Farm all the way to Salt Bay Farm Preserve on Belvedere Road.

Over the past several months, Trails and Facilities Manager Jim Grenier, along with volunteer Glenn Kessler, have staked out the full route of the trail.

The route is designed with viewscapes in mind, while avoiding disturbance to sensitive areas such as the historic shell middens. Vistas along the route overlook the middens, the upper river, and Blackstone Point at Salt Bay Farm.



There are several steps still to take before construction can begin as soon as spring of 2022, including getting approval from the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, obtaining the necessary permits, and raising funds.

A project of this size and scope moves forward only with the help of many individuals and organizations. In addition to Coastal Rivers members and supporters, we are grateful to private landowners, LincolnHealth, and the state of Maine’s Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Bureau of Parks and Lands, Department of Transportation, and Department of Environmental Protection.

If you are very fortunate, on the day you visit, you’ll meet all sorts of people. Whether on foot or on wheels, all are glad to be there on the trail. There is nothing like feeling the sun on your cheek, seeing the light sparkle on the river, and hearing the wild cry of the red-tailed hawk who lives nearby.

▶ Find a trail to explore at coastalrivers.org/preserves-trails/properties-town.

Coastal Rivers: What's in a name?

Protecting the lakes, ponds, wetlands, rivers and estuaries of the Damariscotta-Pemaquid region is at the heart of everything we do. We are “Coastal Rivers” after all!

But what does that actually look like? Our water bodies are so different, and threats come in many forms. Highlighted here are some important ways we promote clean, healthy water, from Duckpuddle to the Damariscotta.



Looking out into Bradstreet Cove from the new Captain Robert Spear Preserve in South Bristol.

Volunteer Bob Barkalow collects a water sample at the Damariscotta town landing.



Conserving where it counts

We often talk about protecting water quality and conserving land as if they were two separate things – when in reality, they are closely tied together.

Certain properties have an outsized influence on water quality because of their proximity to wetlands or waterways, making them top priority for conservation.

This was the case with the Phillips Farm property on Route 1 in Newcastle, at one time slated to become the site of a big box superstore surrounded by acres of parking lots. This impermeable surface would have shed high volumes of runoff into Oyster Creek and degraded water quality in Great Salt Bay, at the head of the Damariscotta River Estuary.

Instead, with support from the community, Coastal Rivers and Maine Farmland Trust partnered to purchase the property and protect it with an agricultural easement. It's now owned by Morning Dew Farm, an organic farm growing food for local restaurants, vendors, and farmers' markets.

Monitoring water quality

Is it safe to swim in? Is it safe for growing oysters? How does what we're doing on land affect water quality? These are the kinds of questions we are answering through our water quality monitoring initiatives.

As a service to the towns of Damariscotta and Bristol, Coastal Rivers volunteers sample for harmful bacteria at Bristol Mills, Biscay Pond beach, and Pemaquid Beach (all of which have a clean bill of health). Water quality is also monitored in Duckpuddle, Pemaquid, Muddy, Biscay, and McCurdy ponds for Lake Stewards of Maine. Results are available online at lakesofmaine.org.

Other volunteers take measurements and samples at seven points along the Damariscotta River Estuary. Over many seasons of monitoring, our data shows that by and large, the estuary is very healthy. For a more thorough analysis, **watch our recorded workshop at coastalrivers.org/water-quality-damariscotta-river**.



2020 summer intern Lulu Linkas inspects a boat at the Pemaquid Pond boat landing for any invasive aquatic plants that may be hitching a ride.

Keeping invasive aquatic plants at bay

Aquatic invasive plants can have a devastating effect on native plants, fish, birds and other aquatic species in our lakes and ponds. In water bodies where invasives have taken hold, they hamper human recreation as well, making boating, fishing, and swimming difficult, and causing property values to plummet.

Plants or bits of plants can “hitchhike” on boats and trailers and in this way can spread from an infected water body to another lake or pond.

To help prevent such a fate for the chain of lakes and ponds that make up the Pemaquid River system, Coastal Rivers participates in the **Courtesy Boat Inspection program**. Friendly volunteers or intern inspectors take shifts at area boat landings to talk with boaters, provide information about invasive plants, and, with permission, scan the boat and trailer for any signs of unwanted plants.

In addition, we coordinate “Invasive Plant Patrol,” or volunteers who wade, paddle, and motor the ponds to keep a lookout for invasive plants. Any plant that looks questionable is sampled and sent to a state lab for identification.

To date, **no invasive aquatic species have been detected in our lakes and ponds**, and we are doing all we can to keep it that way!

On Biscay Pond, Karen Millett (pictured) and her husband Peter were awarded a LakeSmart designation in May.



Building better buffers

Lake and pond-side homeowners have reason to care about water quality. If that quality declines, so does the number of fish species, opportunities for recreation, and property values.

Administered by Maine Lakes and coordinated locally by Coastal Rivers, the LakeSmart program offers homeowners a free evaluation of all aspects of property management with respect to water quality. A primary goal is to minimize the amount of phosphorous entering the pond, which is a key factor in preventing algal blooms.

If homeowners don't meet the standard initially, they receive guidance on how to resolve any issues. Participants who do meet the standards receive an award certificate and a sign recognizing the property as being LakeSmart.

For more info or to request an evaluation, email Sarah Gladu at sgladu@coastalrivers.org.

► Learn more about our water quality initiatives, and how we've adapted during the pandemic, in our Membership Celebration 2020 video! bit.ly/membership-celebration-2020

Supporting our teachers on the front line

Teachers have a difficult job in the best of times. In this pandemic year, without the ability to offer our usual in-person school programs, we've had to get creative about how we can support our teaching partners at local schools.



Teacher trainings

We know that for every teacher we support through training, many students will benefit. We've created a series of online workshops on a wide range of topics, from birds to traditional Wabanaki plant use. The trainings provide activity ideas for different ages as well as content and resources for the class. **Above: Sarah Gladu on the air.**



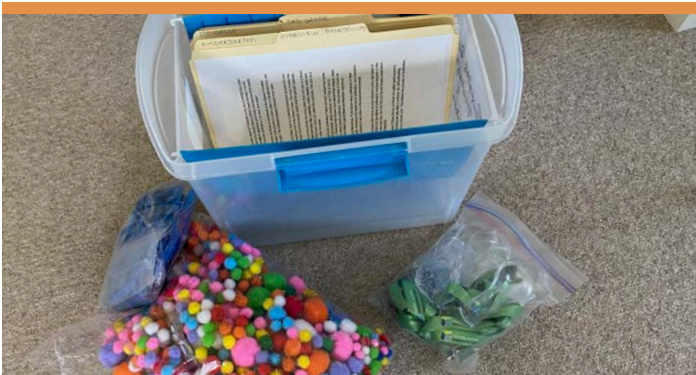
Online nature classes

Who would have guessed online nature classes with a naturalist could offer such rich experiences? Students in Lincoln Academy's IDEAL program have been "Zooming" weekly with Sarah Gladu, conducting experiments, learning survival skills, and sharing observations. **Above: LA students look for local plants on the trail at Salt Bay Preserve.**



A traveling Wabanaki Fair

Previously hosted at Coastal Rivers Salt Bay Farm, our celebrated Wabanaki program went on tour this year. We packaged up activities and resources so that participating schools could set up self-guided, station-style exploration. A big benefit was that more students at different grade levels could participate. **Above: Students at Great Salt Bay Community School try out the feather dance game.**



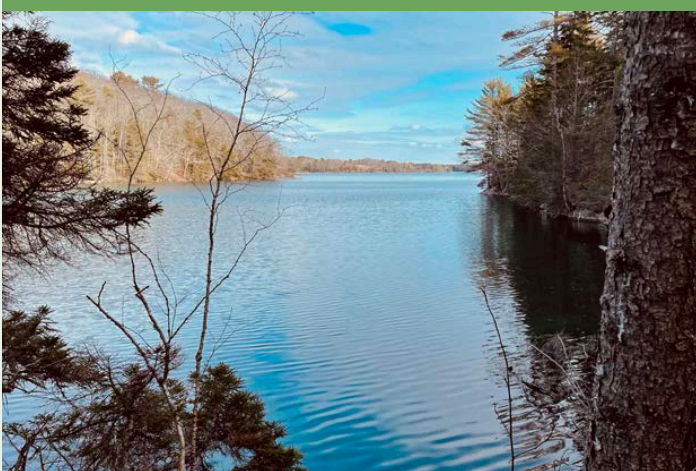
Resources and activity kits

We updated our website this fall with a smorgasbord of teaching resources, including activity kits like the one pictured above: a box of supplies, instructions, information, reading activities, and more that are adapted for a range of grade levels. Kits can be used as a complete lesson plan or in bits and pieces to round out a unit.

► Find our teaching resources online at coastalrivers.org/events-programs/for-schools-groups.

Where did that recording go? Visit our online video library

There's something for everyone in our online library of recorded workshops, trainings, and "walks and talks" with naturalist Sarah Gladu! Explore local preserves, identify wild edibles, be amazed by plant-insect interactions with entomologist Charley Eiseman, and learn about water quality in the Damariscotta River estuary or in our lakes and ponds, all from the comfort of your own home. **Find these recordings and others at coastalrivers.org/category/recorded-workshops-trainings.**



▲ The new Captain Robert Spear Preserve in South Bristol includes a stretch of shoreline along Bradstreet Cove.

Peace and solace in this woods by the water

In December, Coastal Rivers acquired an 18-acre property along Texas Road in South Bristol. A gift from Beth Fisher of Phippsburg, Maine and family, this spruce covered ridge is a haven for wildlife.

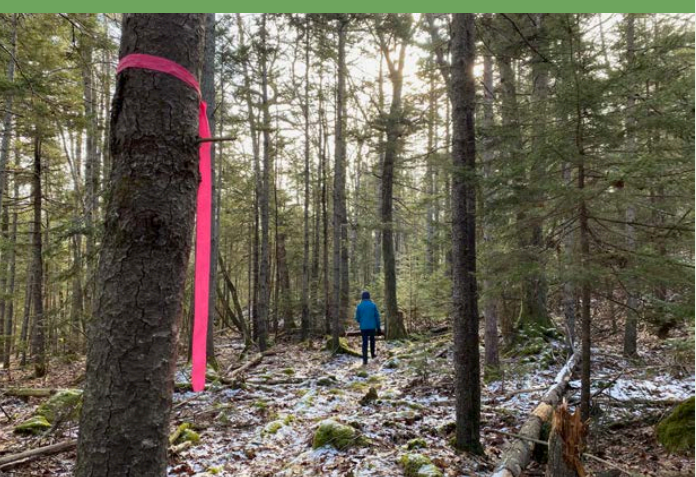
Ms. Fisher has asked that the preserve be named in memory of her husband, Captain Robert Spear. She writes, "As a young man, Captain Rob built a home on Texas Road in South Bristol where he settled with his first wife, Deborah. He later lived on the Kennebec River in Phippsburg with his second wife, Elizabeth

Fisher. His 60 years on earth were a gift to all who knew him.

"In his honor, I, Beth Fisher, and his children, Julie Spear and Charles Spear, wish to give this small sanctuary to Coastal Rivers Conservation Trust to allow others the opportunity to find peace and solace in this woods by the water. We wish to pay it forward, in remembrance of Rob Spear, who lived life abundantly despite its challenges and always with a bright smile and a kind word to all he met."

There is no dedicated parking or trail planned at this time, but the preserve is open to the public for walking.

▼ Director of Land Conservation Joan Ray walks the boundary of the 18-acre preserve, a gift from Beth Fisher of Phippsburg.





Exploring the quiet reaches of Upper Johns Bay

By Hannah McGhee

When Steven asked me to take photos this past fall of a new preserve in upper Johns Bay in South Bristol, I jumped at the chance to explore a new-to-me area of our coastline.

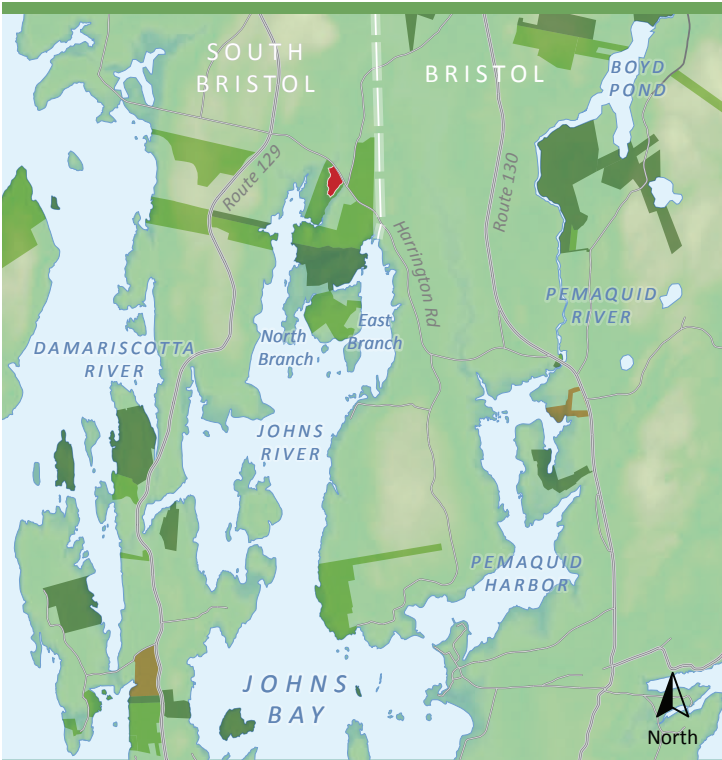
Taking a closer look at the map, it was clear why Steven was so excited about this 10-acre property, donated by Bob and Roberta McLaughlin. It is bounded on two sides by streams that feed into a meandering tidal salt marsh, a wetland that floods and drains with the tides. This marsh in turn extends southward before jogging west to enter the Johns River North Branch.

Because of its location between two streams that flow into the wetland, any development or road construction on this property would directly affect water quality in the marsh.

Not only does the property form an important buffer for the neighboring wetland, it also adds a central piece to a connected network of conserved lands at the heart of the Johns River.

▲ The preserve can be viewed at high tide in a small canoe or kayak.

▼ Shown below in red, the preserve adds an important piece to a connected network of conserved lands in upper Johns Bay. Dark green indicates lands owned by Coastal Rivers; light green properties are privately owned conserved lands; brown properties are partner-owned.



▲ Tracks and signs tell the story of a tidal salt marsh teeming with life. On our visit, paw prints in the mud marked the recent passage of a foraging raccoon.

I had heard our “Johns Bay North Branch Wild Shores Initiative” mentioned several times in my experience at Coastal Rivers, but I didn’t appreciate the value of this largely undeveloped area until I experienced it in person.

To get the best photos, my husband and I paddled in by kayak. As we entered the upper reaches of Johns Bay, I was struck by how wild it seemed, and how quiet it was. A handful of harbor seals popped their heads above water to watch us paddle by. Cormorants and gulls crowded after a school of fish near the shore, and we saw osprey, several great blue herons, and a bald eagle.

Happily, we caught the tide near its peak in the salt marsh and were able to follow the narrow winding channel almost up to the point where it entered the trees. Everywhere were signs that the marsh provides abundant food and refuge for diverse wildlife.

A turkey feather caught my eye, suspended in the grass above the bank. Just below were perfectly preserved paw prints in the mud, submerged by the rising tide, marking the recent path of a foraging raccoon. Also visible in the shallow water was the pockmarked trail of an early morning clammer.

From my work in conservation I know that tidal salt marshes like this one provide valuable benefits well beyond what we could see from our kayaks. Salt marshes take up an outsized measure of carbon, for

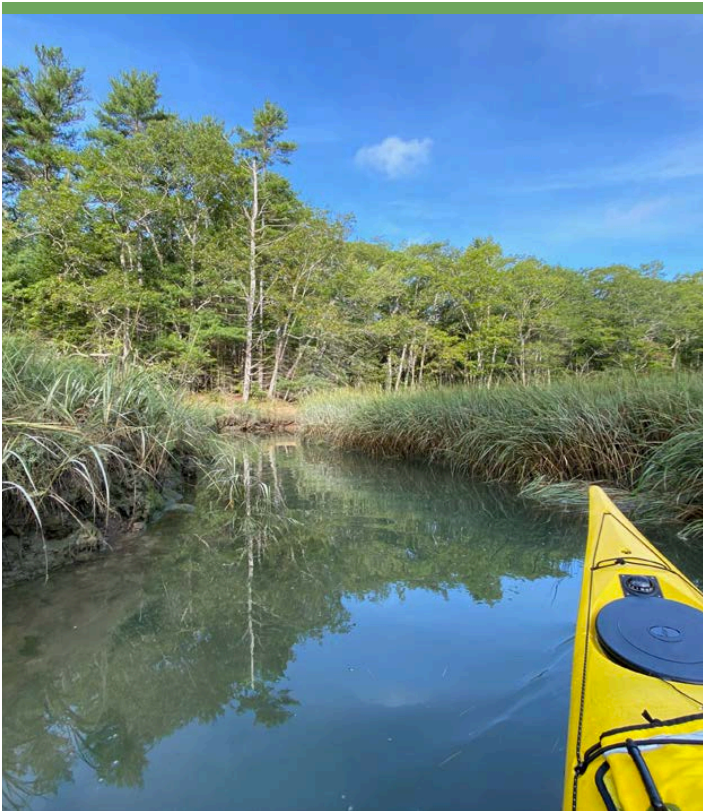
example, which is stored in the plants, dead grass, and mud.

Additionally, tidal salt marshes protect water quality by filtering runoff, and act as a buffer, reducing damage caused by flooding and storm surge.

This knowledge makes me appreciate all the more what the McLaughlins and their neighbors have done for wildlife and for water quality by setting this remarkable area aside.

As we rounded a bend in the channel, a great blue heron took flight with a croaking call. We stopped paddling to watch. I was grateful to reflect that once we returned the way we had come, there would be very little to disturb the inhabitants of this lovingly protected place.

▼ More than just a pretty view, tidal salt marshes provide crucial habitat for many forms of wildlife, protect water quality by filtering runoff, reduce erosion caused by flooding and storm surge, and take up and store abundant carbon.



► Explore options for conserving your land! Contact Joan Ray at 207-563-1393 x310.



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A video guaranteed to make you feel good about the work you make possible in the Damariscotta-Pemaquid region.

Find it on YouTube at
bit.ly/membership-celebration-2020



“I said, can’t we just try email?”



Email is the best way to stay current with Coastal Rivers! If you don’t get our monthly emails, be sure to sign up at coastalrivers.org.