Rooted in Community

Fall 2022 | Vol.5, No. 2 | The Community Issue
THE MISSION OF MIDCOAST CONSERVANCY IS TO PROTECT AND RESTORE VITAL LANDS AND WATERS ON A SCALE THAT MATTERS.

WE ENVISION A WORLD WHERE OUR LANDS AND WATERS ARE HEALTHY AND PROTECTED AND WHERE NATURE OCCUPIES A PLACE OF CENTRAL IMPORTANCE IN EVERY PERSON'S LIFE.

YOUR COMMUNITY!

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WE ALL HAVE A MUTUAL INTEREST; IT IS THE ONE THING ALL OF US SHARE.

THE ENVIRONMENT IS WHERE WE ALL MEET; WHERE WE ALL HAVE A MUTUAL INTEREST; IT IS THE ONE THING ALL OF US SHARE.” —LADY BIRD JOHNSON

Conserving our interdependence and the problems we face, it is critical that a group of people—a community—works together to envision and assemble a reciprocal relationship with the natural world that, at once, sustains both our human community and the larger world in which we are nested. As Lady Bird Johnson once said, “The environment is where we all meet; where we all have a mutual interest; it is the one thing all of us share.”

We are incredibly fortunate here on the midcoast of Maine to have a community that is “knee-deep” in the natural world; whether as hunter or angler, clammer, lobsterwoman, or forester, hiker or bird watcher, we have many intimate connections with the natural world as part of our daily lives.

Our work here at Midcoast Conservancy is, in very basic terms, in service of community, both natural and human. As you will read in the pages that follow, this tenet is reflected in every aspect of our work. We cannot protect and steward the wild places, restore our rivers, and provide recreational, educational, and nature programming here on the midcoast without the support and participation of the entire midcoast community.

As you enjoy this edition of our Drift magazine and learn more about the breadth of our work, ponder how you might get involved—as a member, volunteer, land donor, or advocate—and become part of this growing movement we call Midcoast Conservancy: Protecting and restoring vital lands and waters on a scale that matters!
NEW FACES AT MIDCOAST CONSERVANCY

ERIKA PRESLEY
Senior Land Protection Manager
As Senior Land Protection Specialist, Erika works with landowners, the Lands Committee, and the Board to identify, prioritize, and develop conservation easements and acquisition projects, helping conserve key landscapes in the Midcoast Region. Erika and her family spent the last 15 years living in southern California before moving to Maine, where she has family. She most recently worked as a Naturalist and a Resource Conservationist in southern California, collecting data on commercial fishing vessels. Morganne grew up in Waldoboro exploring the woods in her backyard. She moved to the Pacific Northwest for a brief time to work for the Forest Service and also as a fisheries observer in Alaska, collecting data on commercial fishing vessels. Morganne joins Midcoast Conservancy as our Medomak River Watershed Manager; in that role, she will help coordinate water and land conservation work in the Medomak watershed and beyond. She is thrilled to be back in the Midcoast and is looking forward to using her community ties combined with her experiences from away to benefit her hometown watershed.

MORGANNE PRICE
Medomak River Watershed Manager

JOE CHAPMAN
Trails & Facilities Manager
Joe is responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of Hidden Valley Nature Center. He manages the firewood production, trail improvement projects and hut maintenance, and works closely with the community and volunteers to ensure that visitors will have a quality and fulfilling experience through nature. Joe grew up in Lincoln County and currently lives in Edgecomb with his wife and son. His love for nature and exploring led him to a BA in Adventure Education at Plymouth State University. He enjoys the solitude and simplicity of being in nature; some of his favorite pastimes include canoeing, backpacking, foraging and reading sci-fi novels.

ANNA BLANK
Administrative Manager
Anna is our new Administrative Manager. In her role, Anna supports Midcoast Conservancy by designing and maintaining efficient office systems and policies, managing office files and records, hiring and on-boarding new employees, and maintaining accurate accounts. Before joining Midcoast Conservancy full time, Blank served as a Development Intern this spring. Anna comes to us with a background in agriculture and environmental policy. After five years of farming, and recently completing a BS in Environmental Policy, she sees joining Midcoast Conservancy as the start of an exciting new chapter.

30X30 LAND & WATER CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

By Chris Schorn

IT’S BEEN NEARLY A YEAR SINCE WE LAUNCHED OUR 30X30 LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION INITIATIVE AND PLEDGED TO CONSERVE 30,000 ACRES ON THE MIDCOAST BY 2030. SINCE THAT TIME WE HAVE CONTRACTED WITH RHUMB LINE MAPS TO CONDUCT A GEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF OUR SERVICE AREA AND GAIN INSIGHTS INTO THE LANDSCAPE FOR CONSERVATION. OUR ANALYSIS IS STILL WRAPPING UP, SO WHAT WE HAVE TO SHARE AT THIS POINT ARE LARGELY ANECDOTAL OBSERVATIONS.

OBSERVATION #1
There are 106,931 acres of “core interior” habitat—area at least 1000 feet from human development and roads—within our service area landscape. Our next step is to understand which of these streams are most important for preserving aquatic resilience. Some initial modeling we have done indicates that there may be 7,000 acres that contribute to the drainages of likely coldwater refugia, which are vital for freshwater fish health.

OBSERVATION #2
There are over 2,565 miles of rivers, streams, creeks, and minor drainages across our service area landscape. Our next step is to understand which of these paths are most important, and how we can make a best guess model as to where and how wildlife might be most likely to move across the landscape. The paths most frequently used by wildlife wind their way through woods and waters, but also through our backyards and across our roads. This isn’t news to anyone, but the importance of some of these paths in connecting habitat blocks is.

OBSERVATION #3
Across all the towns in our service area, there are approximately 1,200 parcels that play a critical role in fostering local habitat connectivity.

WHERE WE GO NEXT:
This core habitat is fragmented into blocks spread out across our landscape.

WHERE WE GO NEXT:
This area is twice the size of Acadia National Park. This figure speaks to the great extent of “wilderness” that still remains in the Midcoast.

WHERE WE GO NEXT:
Many of these minor drainages have gone unmapped on prior topographical maps, and our ability to predict their location has only become possible with recent advances in laser-sensing satellite telemetry and publicly-accessible digital elevation models. The density and length of these “capillaries” speaks to just how deeply our entire landscape is linked to water.

WHERE WE GO NEXT:
Across all the towns in our service area landscape.

WHERE WE GO NEXT:
Our next step is to understand which of these streams are most important for preserving aquatic resilience. Some initial modeling we have done indicates that there may be 7,000 acres that contribute to the drainages of likely coldwater refugia, which are vital for freshwater fish health.

WHERE WE GO NEXT:
We need to understand which of these parcels are most important, and how Midcoast Conservancy can best work with landowners to protect these paths into perpetuity.
COUNCIL CORNER: DAMARISCOTTA LAKE  
By Brent Douglass

Watershed Council (DLWC) serves as a catalyst to maintain and strengthen the health of Damariscotta Lake, led by volunteers from the community, is demonstrated in important services provided by DLWC and supported by teams of volunteers. By harnessing the power of our community, we are the most important stewards of Damariscotta Lake. You, the members of our community, are the most important stewards of Damariscotta Lake and its watershed. Please communicate your thoughts to any member of the DLWC, we are always looking for anyone willing to volunteer time and ideas; consider volunteering to serve in one or more of the important programs supported by the DLWC. By harnessing the power of our community voice, we can continue to sustain the quality of Damariscotta Lake.

ON AUGUST 23 MORE THAN 150 PEOPLE GATHERED IN JEWEL LODGE AT WAVUS CAMP FOR THE FIRST STATE OF THE LAKE EVENT, MIDCOAST CONSERVANCY STAFF REPORTED ON THE HEALTH OF DAMARISCOTTA LAKE AND ACTIONS BEING TAKEN TO MAINTAIN WATER QUALITY. ENTHUSIASM AMONG ATTENDEES RESULTED IN NEW CONSERVANCY MEMBERSHIPS, DONATIONS AND NEW FRIENDSHIPS CULTIVATED.

The overwhelming response to the event demonstrates the strong bond between our community and this watershed. Your Damariscotta Lake Watershed Council (DLWC) serves as a catalyst to maintain and strengthen that connection. Our commitment to preserving the health of the lake, led by DLWC, and supported by teams of volunteers from the community, is demonstrated in important services provided by Midcoast Conservancy.

Significant activities supported by the Council include Courtesy Boat Inspection, Invasive Plant Patrol, Youth Conservation Corps projects, the LakeSmart award program and Water Quality Monitoring. Courtesy Boat Inspectors educate the public and examine boats and trailers at the Bunker Hill Road and Vannah Road boat launches for evidence of invasive plants that could harm the lake. In a related effort, Invasive Plant Patrol volunteers survey the shoreline looking for invasive plants. The Council encourages lakefront property owners to consider a Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) project that is currently partially funded by a grant from section 319 of the Clean Water Act. The YCC designs and provides labor at no cost to the landowner to implement erosion control practices and can be a first step in obtaining a LakeSmart award. LakeSmart is an outreach program of Maine Lakes, a science-based action, education, and advocacy organization. Under the guidance of Maine Lakes, Midcoast Conservancy engages owners to make improvements that reduce stormwater runoff carrying harmful pollutants such as phosphorus into the lake.

Water quality monitoring is an important part of Midcoast Conservancy’s mission. Supported by DLWC and with help from volunteers, water samples are collected bi-weekly from May through October, at the deepest site in each basin and near Damariscotta Mills. The outbreak of cyanobacteria, discovered during water quality monitoring this summer, has been of particular concern to the community. High water temperature and excess nutrient (primarily phosphorus) concentrations in the lake are ideal conditions for algae and cyanobacteria growth.

You, the members of our community, are the most important stewards of Damariscotta Lake and its watershed. Please communicate your thoughts to any member of the DLWC, we are always looking for anyone willing to volunteer time and ideas; consider volunteering to serve in one or more of the important programs supported by the DLWC. By harnessing the power of our community voice, we can continue to sustain the quality of Damariscotta Lake.

MIDCOAST CONSERVANCY HAD A MAGICAL SUMMER IN THE MEDOMAK REGION! FIRST AND FOREMOST, WE ARE SO EXCITED TO WELCOME MORGANNE PRICE AS OUR NEW FULL-TIME MEDOMAK RIVER WATERSHED MANAGER.

Morganne grew up and currently resides along the Goose River, and will be primarily working out of our Waldoboro office on Friendship Street. One of the first things Morganne did as a new employee was to request that office staff and visitors park in support of local downtown businesses. This small but important gesture demonstrated Morganne’s natural ability to advocate for our towns, our rivers, and our natural lands. We are so excited to work with Morganne over the coming years as she helps our community meet the growing environmental threats.

In addition to welcoming Morganne, we also hosted several community events, including a Rewilding Workshop and Native Plant Sale at the Waldoboro Village River Park, a Happy Hour at Odd Alewives, and our fabulous Medomak Mixer overlooking Muscongus Harbor as part of the Toast the Midcoast series.

Of course, we did more than just party… Charlie Wetherell and the Medomak Valley Trail Crew were busy all summer clearing trails, building bridges, and otherwise sprucing up our many public preserves. Bennett Collins, Tim Trumbauer, and Ali Stevenson worked with the Maine Island Trail Association (MITA) to lead a volunteer lobster trap cleanup at Oar Island (read more on page 22).

On the water quality side, Brooke Pacy, Bennett Collins, Kristin Rupert, and John Foor helped serve as volunteer captains for our water quality monitoring program in partnership with the Maine Coastal Observing Alliance (MCOA); and Tim and Morganne have been monitoring bacteria pollution and investigating potential sources in Bremer’s Broad Cove, an important mudflats for the local clammers.

While we are proud of what we accomplished this summer, we are even more excited for what we can do next year with an expanding staff, an energized community, and majestic lands and waters worth protecting.
30x30 Conservation Strategy identified many areas in the headwaters that are critical to this vision. Many of these identified are key to connecting the protected lands in along the Sheepscot River with Frye Mountain Wildlife Management Area and if implemented would create nearly a 10,000 acre protected area that would benefit the endangered Atlantic Salmon spawning areas and provide recreation access for members of the community with a connection to the Hills to Sea Trail that was spearheaded by local residents.

Friends of Haystack Mountain member Lorna Crichton provided information about the group’s work raising money to save Haystack Mountain from development. Once the property has been purchased, Midcoast Conservancy will assume responsibility for its ongoing management. The Goosepecker Trekker is an annual event on the first Saturday of October each year. Mark your calendars and keep an eye on the Midcoast conservancy website for information and registration!

Read more about the Friends of Haystack Mountain on page 19.

FOR OVER 11,000 CONSECUTIVE YEARS, SINCE THE RETREAT OF THE LAURENTIDE ICE SHEET, THE SHEEPSCOT HAS BEEN A WONDERFUL PLACE TO ENJOY A MAINE SUMMER. (WELL, WE THINK.) THIS YEAR WAS NO EXCEPTION!

This year, there were two hikes offered for participants: a three mile loop for the more adventurous, and a shorter 2 mile hike through the Whitten Hill Preserve in Montville. It was a glorious day for a hike and all returned with strong appetites for the amazing potluck lunch with grilled chicken and beer provided by Midcoast Conservancy. Participants and supporters of the Goosepecker Trekker sponsored by the Sheepscot Headwaters Council of Midcoast Conservancy.

After the lunch, Executive Director Pete Nichols and Board President Buck O’Herin delivered brief remarks about the importance of the Sheepscot Headwaters in preserving biodiversity and habitat connectivity in the midcoast region and how the recently completed

trail and stewardship projects have continued apace! Staff and volunteers got together this summer to fix bridge at Stener and Bass Falls, and to manage invasive species at Trout Brook Preserve as part of our novel Sheepscot Knotweed Project. Read more about the Knotweed Project on page 24 and reach out to us if you’d like to be involved next time!

In other news, this summer Midcoast Conservancy applied for funding for three fish passage projects in the Sheepscot watershed that intend to restore access to significant high-quality habitat for Atlantic salmon, alewives, and other sea-run fish species. These exciting projects include fishway installation and dam repair at Branch Pond in China; the replacement of a severely-perched and undersized culvert, and stream channel restoration at Ben Brook in Alna; and a feasibility study investigating options for removal of the remnant dam at Masey’s Mills in Windsor. These three projects will build on the Sheepscot Valley community’s many years of successful fish passage projects on the Sheepscot River, and will provide both ecological and community benefits.

Also in Sheepscot water-world, we’ve partnered with US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Department of Marine Resources, and the Atlantic Salmon Federation to pilot habitat assessments on the Sheepscot River this summer and fall. The goal is to classify the habitat quality of each section of river, providing us with an understanding of habitat conditions and factors impacting watershed processes. This will allow us to develop a strategic approach that restores the Sheepscot watershed in a holistic manner.

We are always welcoming new folks to get involved—reach out for more information!
When More is More: A Short History of Midcoast Conservancy

By Ali Stevenson

THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY, A COMMUNITY THAT COULD DO MORE BY COMING TOGETHER, IS AT THE HEART OF MIDCOAST CONSERVANCY’S INCEPTION. SPARKED BY CONVERSATION BETWEEN STEVE PATTON, THEN THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE SHEEPSCOT VALLEY CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION (SVCA), AND JODY JONES, ED OF THE DAMARISCOTTA LAKE WATERSHED ASSOCIATION (DLWA), THE IDEA OF MERGING LOCAL CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS TOOK ROOT. JODY AND STEVE INVITED FIVE OTHER ORGANIZATIONS TO THE TABLE TO DISCUSS THE LOGISTICS, BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF JOINING FORCES TO EXPAND THE CAPACITY TO CARE FOR THE MIDCOAST AREA.

Of the original seven organizations, four put the question to their memberships (Hidden Valley Nature Center’s bylaws did not require a membership vote) and three were greenlit to join HVNC in the merger: DLWA, SVCA and Sheepscot Wellspring Land Alliance (SWLA). After careful work with a skilled facilitator to think through the implications, and anticipate as many potential pitfalls as possible, Midcoast Conservancy was launched in January, 2016.

Despite the long, thoughtful weeks and months that preceded the merger, it was not a simple transition. Precisely because each of the organizations had a strong sense of local community and of a shared mission, the process of blending with three other similarly devoted, place-based groups was not uncomplicated. The same passion that drove the creation of each of the organizations, whether an environmental crisis or desire to protect a precious lake or the love of a rich and historic river or the desire to protect and share a thousand acres of roadless forest, made each collective protective of the places that inspired their mission.

Like any community with shared values, though, Midcoast Conservancy members put their shoulders to the wheel, growing together and richer for the conversations, challenges and vision that emerged over the early years. In 2018, after watching the scale of impact that the merger had provided for the Sheepscot River and Damariscotta Lake watersheds, the Medomak Valley Land Trust took its own leap of faith and joined the Midcoast Conservancy family, bringing with it a deeply committed and engaged group of trail stewards, working waterfront protectors and a remarkable record of conserving large and important lands.

Being part of a community requires listening, trust, commitment and shared beliefs. At Midcoast Conservancy, we are blessed with a vibrant community of volunteers, members and supporters who believe in the magic that can happen when we pull together, and in the same direction.
Tracy and Bambi wanted to demonstrate a new model of land protection—one that engaged people, was fun for them and others in the community, and could be economically sustainable.

THE VISION
Community spirit is baked into the DNA of Hidden Valley Nature Center. From its very inception, born of the shared conservation passion of Bambi Jones and Tracy Moskovitz, the vision was to connect and protect as much land as possible for the betterment of wildlife and human communities.

After buying an abandoned farm in Whitefield, the two dug into rural Maine life; Bambi created an early Community Supported Agriculture system in 1990, and Tracy deepened his interest in and active management of their forestland. In 2007 Tracy and Bambi placed 500 acres of their property (together with six abutting neighbors’ land consisting of another 500 acres) under conservation easement with Maine Farmland Trust.

Bambi and Tracy were avid hikers and cross-country skiers. Much of their and neighboring land was crisscrossed with old logging trails which they cleared and maintained. When they discovered Little Dyer Pond, the beauty and remoteness captured their interest. They wrote letters to every landowner on the pond, expressing their interest in purchasing the land around it. Between 1993 and 2012, they assembled nearly 1,000 acres of undisturbed land including the entire western shore of Little Dyer Pond. Between 1993 and 2012, they assembled nearly 1,000 acres of undisturbed land including the entire western shore of Little Dyer Pond.

THE PRESENT
Thanks to the forward-thinking conservation of Bambi and Tracy, the 1,000 acres comprising Hidden Valley Nature Center are as pristine and awe-inspiring as they were three decades ago. No matter which direction you go upon entering the preserve, you are guaranteed adventure and wonder. Essential to HVNC is Midcoast Conservancy’s commitment to providing opportunities for all to find their path there.

FORESTRY COMMUNITIES
As a model of sustainable forestry, HVNC provides a place for community members to learn practical skills like safe chainsaw skills and timber frame construction. Using beams milled from carefully maintained and monitored woodlots at Hidden Valley, course participants discover the beauty and functionality of construction using responsibly-harvested wood. Understanding the balance and benefit of selective logging is a critical message that the work at HVNC helps to share with the community. Using demonstration woodlots, and welcoming groups like the Women Foresters Collaborative or MOFGA’s Femme, non-binary, trans and women’s chainsaw safety class to the preserve, HVNC is a powerful classroom and model of best practices.

EDUCATION COMMUNITIES
HVNC is a community classroom. Any given week, there might be a guided hike. Eager to learn more about lichen, vernal pools, mushrooms or bird identification? Keep your eyes peeled for upcoming programs! We are blessed with an extraordinary cadre of volunteer naturalists and passionate amateurs who generously offer their time and talent to enrich our education programming.

THE DRIFT | Fall 2022
The Welcome Center, named after Roland S. Barth, has been a hub for planning, organizing, and providing rec

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**RECREATION COMMUNITIES**

From HVNC’s humble start, the town of Damariscotta and Biddeford evolved its programs to support the needs of the community. Today, the organization offers a variety of ways for residents and visitors to enjoy the outdoors. Options for recreation are abundant: trails are groomed all winter for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and fat tire bikes; little wilds for their treks; and horseback riders can enjoy the wide trails for their adventures. Our community ski events and educational programs.

As community use of HVNC increased and campsites so that across our beloved Midcoast Conservancy service area. As a well-used community resource, we protect and restore vital lands and waters on a scale that matters.

As a recognized community nature center, HVNC remains a model for educational programs that welcome visitors, align with the onset of HVNC’s middle name! As Tracy Smith, HVNC’s board president, says, “HVNC’s middle name is ‘Fun’!”

Thanks to the Welcome Center, we will be able to offer a variety of activities to visitors and residents. Our core mission of providing opportunities for all, and our focus on enhancing visitors’ experiences, will continue the HVNC tradition of welcoming visitors and campers so that across our beloved Midcoast Conservancy service area.

Our community ski events and educational programs.

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Out in the midcoast gatherings, we are more than just a flock of strangers. We are a community of people who identify with and value one another's presence and contributions. We are united by our shared experiences and aspirations. We are stronger together, and we will continue to strive for a world where everyone feels welcome and valued. Let's build a safer, more equitable future for all.
REDEFINING COMMUNITY: ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS & ADVOCACY

By Isobel Curtis

DO YOU KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOR’S NAME? NO, NOT CHERYL OR PAUL—I MEAN THE TREE SHADING YOUR DRIVEWAY. DO YOU KNOW ITS NAME?

Community (def): a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic or interest in common.

Economical Community (def): an assemblage of interdependent organisms of different species interacting in a specified habitat or area.

Learning the names of our neighbors endows us with another spiritual capacity: the ability to notice. If all conifers look the same, it is impossible to see that only the Hemlock’s graceful boughs are going bare. If we can’t differentiate at the organismal scale, we can’t see change in our local ecological communities. We can’t speak up when something looks off, and we can’t advocate for action. Such is the case with all communities: they function best when members are informed and active participants.

An effective means of connection between Mainers is by talking about experiences of place. The record drought and early blueberry year. An abundance of pogies in the harbor. A gentle breeze off the bay. The ripples on the water mirror the ripples on our faces as we talk about place. These many-faceted neighbors are everywhere and yet somehow so invisible, blending into the great “green tunnel” that forms the backdrop of our lives we simply call “nature”. By learning their names, the green tunnel’s grainy scenery shifts into sharp resolution and we begin to literally see the forest for the trees. As with all things, familiarity gives way to attachment, which seeds connection to and care for our fellow creatures: they function best when members are informed and active participants.

Friends of Haystack Mountain

By Tim Trumbauer

A grassroots effort to protect a special place.

When Haystack Mountain, which connects Liberty and Montville, Maine was put up for sale, a group of locals banded together as Friends of Haystack Mountain (FOHM) to save it from development and to guarantee public access for perpetuity.

Midcoast Conservancy is supporting the local conservation efforts of FOHM by serving as a fiscal sponsor and providing communications and administrative support.

“Maine is at risk of losing its unprotected special places in the next five to 10 years unless the people who know and love these places act quickly and with generosity,” said Buck O’Herin, Midcoast Conservancy’s Board President and a Friend of Haystack Mountain. Friends of Haystack Mountain knows that the time is of the essence. The group has until December to raise $500,000 to preserve the mountain.

Haystack Mountain has a long history of connecting people with nature. Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, located on Deer Isle, is named for the mountain. Couples have gotten married and taken wedding pictures on the mountain. Snowmobile and outdoor enthusiasts have enjoyed the mountain trails in all seasons. The Maine Geological Survey (MGS) recently announced Haystack Mountain as a Maine Geologic Fact and Locality.

Mainers are concerned about the loss of natural spaces. Sophie Veilleux, who grew up in Montville said, “I am not opposed to all development in Maine. Easy access to nature is a privilege that everyone should be able to enjoy if they want to. I welcome sustainable development that increases access to affordable housing and brings a needed boost to our economy. I believe that is possible while still protecting our natural scenery, resources and wildlife. Development for the sake of luxury or profit, which disregards the fragility of our ecosystems, our treasured landscapes and the actual needs of Mainers... that should be avoided at all costs.”

Easy access to nature is a privilege that everyone should be able to enjoy if they want to.

These starry nights inspired a James Webb scientist at the Space Telescope Science Institute, Dr. Justin Pierel, to become an astrophysicist. Dr. Pierel was born and raised in Montville Maine. “When I heard Haystack Mountain had gone up for sale, I knew I had to help preserve it because everyone deserves an opportunity to look up into the night sky and be inspired,” he said.

To learn more about the Friends of Haystack Mountain and upcoming events and opportunities to get involved, visit www.haystackmountainmaine.org.
I’d like to talk about the microscop-ic life in our lake. You may have heard it said that a drop of pond (or specifically Damariscotta Lake) water can contain an entire community: a microscopic community. We’ve heard about one of the players in this microscop-ic community, cyanobacteria, but there are many other kinds of plants, animals, and bacteria, invisible to the naked eye, that call Damariscotta Lake home.

The tiny community of photosynthesiz-ing plants and bacteria (phytoplankton) shifts throughout the year based on a suite of factors such as availability of nutrients and light. One of the biggest factors in determining the phytoplankton community structure is the community structure of grazing zooplankton; you can think of this tiny community as very similar to larger terrestrial grazers (like cows), but things can happen on a much faster scale! Just as deer might prefer to munch on the high-quality forage found in your gar-den, copepods (a type of zooplankton related to lobsters) can selectively forage on phytoplankton. One important limi-tation in the foraging ability of any animal is the size of their mouth. Just as I sometimes struggle to fit a particularly tall sandwich in my mouth, zooplank-ton can be limited in their ability to eat larger types or colonies of phytoplank-ton, and they don’t usually have the benefit of being able to cut things into smaller pieces.

This is true all the way up the food chain in Damariscotta Lake, from the tiniest phytoplankton to the largest of fish. If the herbivore community is dominated by larger-bodied, and thus larger-mouthed, zooplankton, the phy-plankton community is different than if the grazers are all smaller and can’t consume large phytoplankton. Cyanobacteria often form colonies or filaments which make it challenging for some zooplankton to consume—and some kinds of zooplankton are picky eaters! They really don’t like eating certain types of phytoplankton, and cyanobac-teria are like Brussels sprouts—they’re not everyone’s preferred food. Daphnia, a type of water flea, don’t like to eat cyanobacteria. Cyanobacteria can have lower nutritional value, and toxins make them less “palatable” for zooplankton.

It is important to note that cyanobac-teria and other phytoplankton, nutrients, and even sediments are a natural part of a healthy lake ecosystem; the problem is that human impacts like nutrient pollution from excess erosion, warming waters, failing septic systems, and the destruction of protective buffers have thrown the lake out of balance. Let’s do our part to help the lake by reducing erosion, planting native buffers, elimi-nating lawn fertilizer, and maintaining our septic systems: we and the lake thank you!

By Patricia Nease

COMMUNITY CLEAN-UP ON OAR ISLAND

By Ali Stevenson

MIDCOAST CONSERVANCY and MAINE ISLAND TRAIL ASSOCIATION partner with volunteers to remove derelict lobster traps from Oar Island.

The coincides with the inland sides of Muscongus Bay islands are perfect collection spots for wayward lobster traps. Their nooks and crannies invite unauthorized lodging for all manner of detritus, including rope, crumbling buoys and hundreds of mangled traps. Removing the traps is an arduous, multi-step process that requires plenty of resources and specific permission from the Maine Marine Patrol because it is otherwise illegal to move lobster gear even when it has washed up on shore.

In late June, volunteers from Midcoast Conservancy and the Maine Island Trail Association (MITA) joined forces to re-move nearly 200 traps from Oar Island. Long-time Volunteer Monitor skippers Ben Fuller and Tom Carr, along with MITA Regional Stewardship Manager Maria Jenness, piloted three skiffs to the congested coves and offloaded a dozen volunteers and Oar Island co-owner Anne Wesson. Armed with serrated knives, work gloves and high spirits, the team spread out to strip the traps of rope, seaweed and anything else caught inside before loading the emptied traps onto the skiffs.

Monitor skipper Fuller says, “The most difficult and satisfying job in monitor skimming is running a skiff stacked so high with traps and other gear that you need to stand on the seat to be able to see over it as you run pretty slowly. On this occasion we got to do it a number of times. And I’ve been looking at the accumulation of fishing gear on the Oar Island shore for thirty some years and finally have the privilege to do something about it.” Once offloaded on the mainland, volunteers drove the traps to a facility in Washington, where they will be recycled.

Four hours and many skiff-loads later, 5,800 pounds of trap refuse had been removed; more remains but the results of the day were clear and satisfying.

MIDCOAST Conservancy’s Medomak Valley Council Chair Bennett Collins says, “It’s very gratifying to see the out-come when partner organizations come together to share resources, skills, and knowledge to improve our unique envi-ronment here in Midcoast Maine!” Wes-son, the island’s co-owner says, “Thank you so much for organizing the Oar Island clean-ups. What a huge effort that is! The shoreline looks so much better without all those derelict traps in the way. I am grateful to MITA and Midcoast Conservancy. Without their help, those traps would have continued to mar the island as trash, for I could not have removed them without their help. The beauty of the Maine islands in their natural, wild state is something we all treasure and hope to preserve.” Such sentiments are why work day partner-ships like this one are an important way to steward the special places of coastal Maine.
By Tim Libby

This spring we held a Women Owning Woodlands workshop with the Forest Stewards Guild (FSG) for the first time in several years. Our own two foresters Barrie Brusila and Maren Grandstrom joined Alyssa Gregory, our District Forester from the Maine forest Service (MFS), tish care, a forester/ arborist and former program director of one of our parent organizations, and several private forest consultants. The program prepared an audience of highly motivated learners to be better stewards of the land.

Our Low Impact Forestry 101 course with the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) covered everything from soil to tree ID to considerations for woodlot access and careful management. Projects that were funded by the Natural Resources Conservation Service and implemented in our demonstration forest were reviewed and discussed as part of the tour. We were joined by David Roque, recently retired State Soil Scientist and again by Alyssa Gregory from the MFS.

We held a second Forestry for Maine Birds workshop with the Maine Audubon and the FSG. The tour followed along our common forestry tour routes but held an eye toward management for wildlife. A favored takeaway for participants was that leaving woody material in the forest, for the forest, is good: ecology does not want neat and tidy!

We were thrilled to host the summer gathering of the Women Foresters Collaborative. This was a day full of learning, sharing and fun that was attended by 36 foresters from across New England. Presenters included Keyana Pandilla of the Penobscot Nation and Patti Cormier, the Director of the MFS.

Knot in our House: The Sheepscot Knotweed Project

By Kristin Stone & Sheepscot Knotweed Project members

After a conversation last fall about a growing obsession with spotting Japanese knotweed in our neighborhood, Suki Flanagan and I took an impromptu and chilly tube ride down the Sheepscot river from head Tide to the Dock Road to take a more careful look at its spread. We were quite blown away. There is a lot! We are not conservation biologists, but both love the place we live and the process of bringing our community together... especially for the health of the river and the plants, animals, and people that live here.

On our trip, we noticed a huge flagged patch of knotweed on the Midcoast Conservancy property at Tquot Brook Preserve. We reached out to Midcoast Conservancy and learned that Isobel Curtis is heading their invasive species program and the knotweed management on their riverside property.

In partnership with Isobel and Midcoast Conservancy, we gathered a collection of local experts including Carl Solberg and Dan Townsend to help guide our efforts under the name “The Sheepscot Knotweed Project”. Together we conducted a baseline survey of knotweed on the river from Route 17 to Sheepscot Village, mailed riverfront landowners, held a community river float, and offered a knotweed management workshop and hands-on demonstration at Tquot Brook Preserve. The one-acre knotweed patch at the Preserve was cut back twice over the summer with the help of many volunteers, followed by a fall herbicide treatment. This represents one step in a multi-year process to restore the native riparian community there.

The Sheepscot Knotweed Project aims to continue researching and demonstrating best management methods, as well as educating and rallying our community to provide volunteer and technical support for landowners struggling with knotweed. This year was just the start of our effort to ignite the community to confront knotweed in an effective, coordinated, and fun way!

Japanese knotweed (aka false bamboo) is one of the most aggressive non-native invasive plants. It spreads rapidly and outcompetes all native plant species, establishing dense monoculture stands. It frequents areas with high disturbance such as streambanks, roadsides, and construction sites. With stout green stems that can exceed 10 feet in height and broad triangular leaves, knotweed grows a dense canopy that starves all other vegetation of light. Knotweed produces a prodigious system of underground rhizomes and roots that enable it in rapid horizontal spread. It also spreads from live root and foliage fragments so be sure to burn, dry, compost in place, or landfill all live cutting.

Knotweed roots are thick with minimal fine root material, meaning it has less soil-holding capacity than the diverse native plant community it excludes. When knotweed becomes established along stream, erosion becomes a problem, destabilizing streambanks and increasing soil loads. This is a concern as the Sheepscot River provides excellent habitat for migrating Atlantic salmon requiring gravel beds to rear and spawn. Knotweed has become established throughout the Sheepscot Watershed and in other freshwater riparian communities across Maine. These infestations not only displace native plant communities, but threaten all of the animals that live in or depend on these communities.
As the year winds to a close, the story of conservation keeps writing new chapters. Since last fall, Midcoast Conservancy has conserved a number of key properties that will safeguard our landscape’s ecological health and resilience into perpetuity.

In late fall of 2021 two properties were donated to Midcoast Conservancy as fee preserves, to be owned and stewarded by us forever. The 45-acre Aranyani Wildlife Preserve, in Newcastle, was donated by Leonard Duffy in memory of his late wife, Nancy Duffy. “Nancy had a strong connection with nature on many levels; she cared for all the plants and animals around our home in Newcastle,” Leonard explained. “Everywhere she went, Nancy appreciated the delicate balance and interdependence within all of nature.” It was our honor to accept this generous donation of land and continue stewarding it as wild woodland and sanctuary for the biodiversity that Nancy loved.

The next month we accepted a generous donation of the 52-acre Goose River Woodland Preserve on the Waldoboro-Friendship border from Luther Black. Said Luther, “This land was given to me for the purpose of conserving it. It’s been in my family since 1903, and it is my honor to have Midcoast Conservancy as a caretaker of it for future generations.” Well, we’d say the honor is all ours. These quiet wooded acres with frontage on the Goose River contain some of the largest and richest spruce stands we’ve seen on the Midcoast.

In the spring, we finalized two special conservation easement projects. The Full Moon Property contains 120 acres of wooded acres with frontage on the Goose River contain some of the largest and richest spruce stands we’ve seen on the Midcoast. As the year winds to a close, the story of conservation keeps writing new chapters. Since last fall, Midcoast Conservancy has conserved a number of key properties that will safeguard our landscape’s ecological health and resilience into perpetuity.

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Want to add your story to ours? Curious to learn more about options for land conservation? Reach out to us at 207-389-5150 or info@midcoastconservancy.org for more information!

When Charlie Witherrell calls, the trail crew answers.

It was a Wednesday morning, the usual Medomak Trail work day, and a bright bluebird day with the crisp edge of fall. Some of the extensive bog bridging at Peter’s Pond Preserve in Waldoboro had rotted out and needed replacing. Cars rolled into the parking lot until Charlie, Ed, Tina, Ted, Andy, Peter, and James were circled there, exchanging jokes and jabs with the ease of old friends.

Midcoast Conservancy staff was represented by me, Tim Libby, and Morganne. 10 total — perhaps a new record, and only half as many bridges to build!

With the crew assembled Charlie set out. Roles were delegated, boards heaved onto shoulders, and tools dispersed. Everyone’s mood was bright, glad to catch up and be gathered for some final late-season trail work. Two hours later we’d worked up a sweat, done much creative problem-solving, and were feeling quite accomplished. That’s the simple beauty of a day on the trail: it’s an old-time recipe of fresh air, camaraderie, a little manual labor, and a whole lot of feel good.

On any given day from May to October, you can find the Medomak Valley, Whitefield, Northern Headwaters, or Sheepscot Valley crews out on the trails lopping away overgrown vegetation, removing blowdowns, and repairing bridges. The simple math is that every mile of trail requires maintenance and Midcoast Conservancy’s preserves boast a whopping 95 miles of trails!

Maintaining a trail network of this magnitude sounds daunting, but the community always shows up when the call goes out. Those 95 miles of trail are maintained almost exclusively by an amazing group of volunteers. Four volunteer trail crews, one for each region, are headed by four volunteer regional trail coordinators: Charlie Witherrill, David Elliot, Buck O’Herin, and Gerry Flanagan. Additionally, each trail has a volunteer steward that reports maintenance needs.

It is in those moments of people assembling in parking lots, jovial and ready to pitch in, that I really feel the support of this community. Our deputy director Air Rhodes commented in a recent staff meeting how amazed they were by the level of skill, knowledge, and dedication our volunteers have… and that it is something special, not present at all organizations, not to be taken for granted. Truthfully, so much of what we do succeeds only because the community steps in and shows up in some way to protect the land and water we all love. It has been a tremendous honor and pleasure to enter into this community surrounding land and trail stewardship here in the Midcoast. Thank you.
WHY OUR MEMBERS & VOLUNTEERS MATTER!
By Kate Raymond

OUR MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS SUPPORT OUR MISSION IN SO MANY IMPACTFUL WAYS AND HELP TO STRENGTHEN THE ENDURING CONNECTIONS WE HAVE WITH THE MIDCOAST COMMUNITY!

Midcoast Conservancy currently has 2100+ active members!

Our 250+ active volunteers make many of our vital programs possible, including Invasive Plant Patrol, Easement Monitoring, Trail Maintenance, Water Quality Monitoring, and so, so much more!

By supporting us, you’ve joined a community of individuals and organizations who understand the importance of protecting and restoring the lands and waters of midcoast Maine on a scale that matters!

Individual contributions made up approximately 65% of our funding last year.

Over the last year, the support of our members and volunteers have allowed us to provide 125+ public programs and events, reaching 3,500+ people.

HERE IS WHAT FOUR OF THEM HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THEIR MIDCOAST CONSERVANCY COMMUNITY:

Lili and Alex Pugh, Members & Volunteers
“We support and are active members of Midcoast Conservancy because they work to protect the land and waters we love. We believe the continued growth of the organization better enables it to do its work on a scale that matters.”

Kyle Markmann, Member & Volunteer
“The Midcoast Conservancy has become such a large part of my life since becoming a member. I have found so many like-minded people that share my passion for the Midcoast and the environment. Since getting involved, I’ve learned more about everything from forestry to cross-country skiing. That is all great—but what has been the most incredible is the community I have found while doing all those things! I have found my home with Midcoast Conservancy.”

Lizzie Stebbins, Member & Volunteer
“I volunteer at Midcoast Conservancy as an expression of gratitude for Damariscotta Lake and the peace and beauty I experience every time I look out of my window. Midcoast Conservancy is devoted to the health of the Lake and I want to be a part of that. Volunteer- ing provides me with a sense of purpose and community — plus you meet the nicest people!”

“You inspire us daily through your support of our work, and truly make it possible for us to fulfill our mission!” —Kate

COMMUNITY CLASSROOM
By Andy Bezon

WE LIKE TO CALL HIDDEN VALLEY NATURE CENTER AN OUTDOOR CLASSROOM, AND INDEED IT IS FOR ANYONE WHO FORAGES FOR MUSHROOMS ALONG ITS TRAILS AS PART OF A MUSHROOM IDENTIFICATION WORKSHOP OR GOES ON A HIKE TO LEARN ABOUT BIRD SONG OR FERNS OR HORSE-POWERED FORESTRY PRACTICES.

But it functions as another kind of classroom as well. For three years, between 2017 and 2020, Midcoast Conservancy sent its AmeriCorps members into classrooms around our service area; two teams brought our outdoor adventure gear to schools so that kids could get outside, excited about recreation and fun ways to exercise, and explore the trails in their local communities. The benefits were clear: a middle schooler getting on a bike for the first time, glee as kids slid down trails on cross-country skis, the revelation of preserves close to home. But from a practical standpoint, two teams of two people could only do so much, get to only so many schools in a year. After the necessary pandemic pause, we made a decision to pivot the program to a more scalable model: outdoor adventure leadership training.

The leadership training program allows us to bring community program leaders—teachers, scout leaders, Boys’ and Girls’ Club directors and more—to HVNC to learn the ropes with our fat tire bikes, cross-country skis and stand-up paddleboards. Staff teach them how to size bikes and skis to users, how to instruct kids unfamiliar with the gear to gain mastery, and even the basics of map reading and route planning so students and community leaders can be empowered to lead their own adventure at HVNC. Like the adage about giving someone a fish versus teaching them to fish, our outdoor adventure programs can feed the needs of many more communities through this leadership training approach.

With the imminent opening of the Roland S. Barth Welcome Center, we will be able to do even more. Future plans include a full-time Education Coordinator, based at HVNC, who will oversee a regular roster of visits from schools, provide educational programming, and support groups using the preserve for experiential learning. As a classroom, Hidden Valley Nature Center is boundless and so are our hopes for the ways it will continue to grow in the ways it meets the needs of our Midcoast Conservancy communities!

As a classroom, Hidden Valley Nature Center is boundless and so are our hopes for the ways it will continue to grow to meet the needs our communities.
Cozy in the Pond Cabin at Hidden Valley Nature Center