



Friends of Sears Island Newsletter

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This year:

- People participating in Sears Island activities and signing up for membership more than doubled to over 200. P. 1-3
- Searsport High School began a "biological station" classroom on Sears Island for marine and coastally themed studies. P. 2
- Invasive plant management was implemented with a focus on controlling the most serious threats to the island's biodiversity. P. 2
- Friends of Sears Island partnered with 14 local and state organizations. P. 4



A Successful Season on the Island

Our season of events concluded October 19th with a walk and field lab to explore mosses and lichens on Sears Island with naturalist Cloe Chunn.

Our Natural History Seminar Series included a wide variety of events geared towards exploring different aspects of Sears Island's amazing diversity, from fungi, plants, birds and insects to geology. There were specialized seminars as well as general walks with something for everyone. We shared a long hike with Sierra Club members in May, and in August teamed

up with interpretive ranger Todd Miller to enjoy a fun walk for children and families.

Special activities for students allowed Bucksport Middle School to explore the tidal zone, Mid Coast 4H to solve island mysteries, and Unity College and Searsport High School to complete a variety of service and learning experiences on the island. In all, over 200 people participated in events on Sears Island this year.



Dr. Stephen Norton explains why the shore of the island has so many types of rocks.

See page 2 and 3 for more on the season's events.

Sears Island Gets a Major Makeover

Perhaps the most visible change in our island landscape is the major improvement of the entry area, a collaborative effort of Friends of Sears Island (FOSI), and many local and state organizations and volunteers.

From its previous degraded and foreboding entry with concrete barriers and broken chain link fence, the gate has been revitalized and recreated to provide a very attractive, park style entrance befitting its use as a conservation and recreation area. The recent transformation of the entry to

Sears Island began more than a year ago when a small committee headed by VP Susan K. White met in Augusta with members of Maine's Department of Transportation and Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, and the Searsport Town Manager, to develop a plan for a new entry. More meetings and what seemed like a thousand emails produced the final design by MDOT's Deane Van Dusen and work began in July. Deane also coordinated and supervised all the elements at Augusta, and

then worked with Searsport's Kinney Construction as they set in eleven bollards. Town Manager James Gillway and Maintenance Head Bobby Seekins pulled the local elements together, including Boy Scout Logan Seekins's Eagle Scout project -- painting the spruced up gate and the bollards. In addition, our kiosk was fully redesigned with a professional map, courtesy of Robin Tara Designs, and new interpretive text and information sheets.

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Sears Island: A Year in Pictures

A Mid Coast Learning Center



Our outdoor season began in April, with **Waldo County 4-H** exploring the island, solving mysteries written in the landscape's stone walls, giant trees, and rock lined cellar holes. (Above right and left)



From Elementary School Through College...



The spring continued with **Bucksport Middle School** Students learning about scientific methods for sampling life in the tidal zone.



" I can't think of a natural area along the mid coast that offers such a combination of accessible, varied natural lands along with an organization ready to assist students and teachers in creating an authentic learning experience."

Searsport High School began a new course focused entirely on Sears Island as a part of their innovative coastal studies theme at the school (below, left). Several teachers will team teach this multidisciplinary course, beginning this fall with a study of the diversity of life on the island.



Unity College students spent a pre-fall semester day of learning and service on the island, where they learned about its different ecosystems, human effects on those systems, and removed most of the invasive purple loosestrife plants from a sensitive low dune habitat (right).



2014 Natural History Seminar Series



**"Dear Island,
Thank you for your
beauty and strength.
You inspire me."
- Visitor comment**



Photos (Clockwise from upper left): Exploring shore geology with Dr. Stephen Norton; learning about sapsuckers from naturalist Todd Miller; Dr. David Porter explains the life cycle of a mushroom species; Dr. Roger Rittmaster points out butterflies feeding on milkweed nectar; a group exploring fungi on the island walk along the Tower Road; State Forester Morten Moesswilde talks about the island's trees; Cloe Chunn shows a group different species of lichens and moss found on the island.

A Lot of Changes You Might Not See

Besides our programs and improvements to infrastructure on the island, Friends of Sears Island (FOSI) members are hard at work creating a strong organization that can protect and enhance the island's environment and resources now and in the future.

This year, a membership database program was created by member Steve Albin, and now FOSI will be easily able to

stay in touch with all of those interested in supporting work to conserve the island.

In addition, the FOSI website has been completely redesigned in an upgraded platform, and will offer easy access to information about the island, including history, trails, news, and activities, as well as providing expanded information about the island's ecology: An interactive portal

to access natural history information about Sears Island will be added and will include updated photo galleries.

A first time appeal is currently underway to ask for much needed funds to continue our work. If you haven't renewed your membership with us, you may visit the website to renew with a donation, or watch for our fall appeal letter in the mail.

"[Cloe Chunn] did a superb job with the moss and lichen hike. I especially appreciated the ending [field lab]-not just because I walked away with some terrific specimens but I felt it was a valuable way to encourage continued study and interest in the topic. Well done!" - Matt Vance, Biologist



Protecting Sears Island's natural and cultural resources.

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Major Makeover,

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A celebration of the new entrance and the successful stewardship of Sears Island by FOSI was held October 29th at the gate, with remarks by former Governor Baldacci, who sent his congratulations on the successful completion of the entrance makeover, saying he is pleased that we have reached this important milestone in the conservation work FOSI has done on the island.

Thank You to Our 2014 Partner Organizations:

The Davis Foundation
 Maine Community Foundation
 The Town of Searsport
 The Maine Department of Transportation
 Kinney Construction
 Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition
 Coastal Mountains Land Trust
 The Sierra Club
 Belfast Boy Scouts
 Unity College
 Searsport High School
 GreenWays Center
 Penobscot Marine Museum
 Searsport Historical Society

A Note from FOSI

Have you noticed anything missing at the end of the causeway at Sears Island? And doesn't it look much friendlier? A celebratory ribbon cutting for our new gate took place on October 29. Farewell to concrete barriers and chain link fencing! (See story on page 1 for more information) FOSI is equally proud of the beautiful, artistic display enhancing our newly painted kiosk. Creator Robin Tara of *Robin Tara Designs* also designed our beautiful logo a few years ago. How fortunate FOSI is to benefit from her talent. Our new entry improvements have highlighted a year of enhancing all aspects of our work on Sears Island, from land stewardship, to infrastructure, to education and organizational action.

Our Outreach Coordinator Aleta McKeage has been on the job in a variety of activities since January, including development of the natural history series,

school curriculum planning for studies on the island, publicity, newsletters, social media, volunteer events, development of a membership database and web page redesign, and more.

FOSI and the Sierra Club joined to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Environmental Act by enjoying a springtime walk on the island. This spring and summer we kept our trail volunteers busy cleaning up after storm damage, along with general maintenance and bog-bridge building; enabling us to host the 2nd High School parents' Together In Education (TIE) 5K run on the island this fall. We also launched our first Fundraising Appeal.

All of our committees have been busy and we invite all interested people who would like to help! We anticipate still more activities before the year's end.

A Special Thanks to....

Jay Economy, Don Cox, Bob Ramsdell, Bill and Jill Kulbe, and Janet Williams who provided trail stewardship this year, and to **Paul Eagle and Kate Harris** for doing Frog Watch and removing amphibian traps on the island. We'd also like to thank **Unity College, Aleta McKeage** and the GreenWays Crew (**Chris Shaffer, Alex Powers and Nick McKeage**) for invasive plant removal and management this summer, and **Searsport High School students and teachers** for help with monitoring of experimental clam seeding plots. We'd like to thank **Marietta Ramsdell, Susan White, Anne and Ben Crimauddo, Judy Kaiser, Sandi Cirillo, Joelle Madiec, Kristen Lindquist and others** who helped with event publicity and the appeal campaign; **Judy Kaiser** as well for her help with data entry. We'd also like to thank **Marge Knnuti** for being on the hiring committee for outreach coordinator and assisting in many ways, **Maura DiPrete** for helping to coordinate the Searport High School program, **Tom Mullin** for fundraising input and Unity connections; **Jack Pikulski** for good ideas at meetings and helping with trail work and events, **Denise Blanchette** for providing support for the Outreach Coordinator, and **Joelle Madiec and David Italiaander** for their help at our Common Ground Fair booth, and all **board members and advisory group members** who have dedicated many hours to meeting and completing planning and work for FOSI. A special thanks goes out as well to **Steve Albin**, for technical help as well as for creating a custom database, and to **Robin Tara** for her professional graphics work on the kiosk display. We'd also like to thank all of the experts who provided wonderful presentations on natural history this season: **Cloe Chunn, Morten Moesswilde, Roger Rittmaster, Aleta McKeage, Stephen Norton, Todd Miller and David Porter**. We'd also like to extend our sincere thanks to those that facilitated the installation of the new entry and our work to conserve Sears Island: **Karin Tilberg**, formerly Senior Advisor to Governor John Baldacci, and **Deane Van Dusen**, Field Services & Mitigation Division, Maine Department of Transportation, **James Gillway**, Searsport Town Manager, **Bobby and Logan Seekins**, and to **all others who have worked with us on this to reach this point of success in stewarding Sears Island.**