

## **Friends of Sears Island Annual Report 2014**

This was an exciting and very productive year for Friends of Sears Island! With funding from the Maine Community Foundation, Davis Conservation Foundation, and Penobscot Bay Alliance, we hired in January a part-time outreach coordinator, Aleta McKeage, who helped us accomplish many of the goals in our 2011-2015 strategic plan. Following is a list of some of our accomplishments:

### **Public Outreach**

- Completed our first major fundraising effort in October 2014. As of December 12, we had gained 15 new business and individual/couple members. We also attracted 10 new active volunteers. This represents a 42% increase in new members and volunteers over the past year.
- Developed a user friendly and up-to-date member mailing database, which was used in our fall fundraising appeal and will be crucial in keeping in touch with members in the future.
- Redesigned our website ([friendsofsearsisland.org](http://friendsofsearsisland.org)) using the Wordpress platform, which can be updated easily. We can now track visitors to the site and individual page usage. We had 2,010 visits (1,209 unique visits) with 10-15 visits per day in the past year.
- Established a presence on Facebook to introduce newcomers to FOSI. From May through September, we made 16 posts with photos on Facebook, had 792 views (56 average views per post, with 135 being the highest post view)—and a 40% increase in page “likes.”
- Organized seven very successful guided nature walks throughout the summer and fall, called “Natural History Field Seminars,” which attracted 150 participants. As of October, 77 people had signed up to receive FOSI news.
- Produced three quarterly newsletters (spring, summer, and fall) and distributed them online and at locations throughout the area.
- Designed and installed new informational materials for the newly painted on-island kiosk. Developed FOSI “welcome” sign, which is installed at the new entrance.
- Produced rack cards, which were widely distributed to visitor centers, hotels and inns, libraries, restaurants, parks, and elsewhere.

### **Collaborations and Partnerships**

In 2014, five new partnerships were formed and existing partnerships were strengthened.

- Formed a strong and productive collaboration with Maine Department of Transportation and the Town of Searsport to redesign and construct vastly improved entrance and gate to Sears Island.
- Strengthened partnerships with Unity College and Bucksport schools for on-island activities.
- Formed new partnerships with Waldo County 4-H, Homeschool Belfast, and Belfast eco-interns.

- Strengthened collaborations with Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition, Sierra Club, and Coastal Mountains Land Trust, co-sponsoring nature walks on the island and other events.
- Established a solid relationship with Searsport High School. There is now an official course offered on Sears Island called “Sears Island: Issues & Possibilities” with on-island and classroom activities.
- Led the annual walk for participants in the Penobscot Bay Stewards program.

### **Community Engagement**

- Had a table at the Common Ground Country Fair in Unity and Belfast Harbor Fest with information about FOSI and our activities.
- Worked with students in Unity College Outdoor Adventure Program to control invasive species on the island and clear sections of the road in preparation for a road race sponsored by Together in Education. The outreach coordinator worked with Bucksport middle school students to complete a scientific study of tidal area organisms on Sears Island. Over 50 students participated in on-island activities.
- Engaged Town of Searsport and the community in several projects. A crew from the Searsport Public Works Department cleared sections of the road in preparation for the above-mentioned road race. In collaboration with MDOT and the Searsport town manager, a local contractor installed the bollards at the new gate; Public Works repaired the old gate; and a Searsport Boy Scout enlisted some scouts from a Belfast troop for his Eagle Scout project, sanding and painting the bollards and gate.
- Held an on-island event to celebrate the completion of the new entrance on October 29. Over 40 people attended, including state agency and town representatives, community members, and Searsport teachers and students.
- Introduced more community members to the island and its unique habitats and ecology through collaborative events, such as the Midcoast Frog Watch (in which participants surveyed amphibians on the island) and Map Meetup (through Beginning with Habitat).
- Constructed new two-sided bench on the Homestead Trail to provide a place for visitors to rest and observe butterflies feeding on the milkweed in the field.
- Maintained and regularly cleared the four official trails on the island, including construction of additional bog bridges over wet areas. After the November storm, a group of FOSI trail stewards spent many hours clearing downed trees from the trails to restore access.

Friends of Sears Island now has, in addition to its eight board members, a very active 10-member advisory group and a cadre of dedicated volunteers who regularly contribute invaluable suggestions, lead projects, help maintain trails, and lend their talents and considerable energy to make it possible for FOSI to fulfill its mission to protect the 601-acre conservation easement on Sears Island. We are forever grateful to all of them.

Here’s to another productive year in 2015!

Marietta Ramsdell, Past President  
Susan K. White, Interim President