

Friends of Sears Island 2016 Annual Report

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www.friendsofsearsisland.org



Protecting the environmental and cultural resources of Sears Island



Volunteers monitor stream organisms.



A volunteer helps maintain the island.



Children explore marine life.



After being the de-facto manager of Sears Island for the past 10 years, Maine Department of Transportation appointed FOSI the official “land management entity” of the 601-acre Conservation Area on the island. Maine Coast Heritage Trust, the easement holder, approved this designation and the three organizations signed an agreement this summer. We take this responsibility seriously and look forward to continuing our mission to preserve and protect the island, while making it accessible for all to enjoy and a destination for visitors and the community at large.

Changes in Leadership

We saw some changes in our leadership this year. Jack Pikulski and Joelle Madiec stepped down from the Advisory Group. Judy Kaiser resigned as Secretary after many years of service and moved to the Advisory Group. Our Treasurer, Joanne McNally, moved out of state mid-year. We extend our thanks to them all for giving so much of their time and energy to FOSI. We were fortunate to add some new board members—Patricia Gladding, Dorothy Fraser as Treasurer, and Janet Williams as Secretary—and we welcome them as valuable additions to the board.

Outreach Coordinator

FOSI contracted with Ashley Megquier as part-time Outreach Coordinator for the summer months when the island has the greatest number of visitors. Ashley proved to be worth her weight in gold! She organized a series of 10 natural history programs, including an innovative Yoga on the Beach program, which attracted seniors as well as younger folks. Working with experts on topics ranging from wildflower identification to geology, we were able to offer many interesting and educational guided walks that drew over 180 participants. Another successful program was Island Explorers, where Ashley led children and their parents on a hike and scavenger hunt, and played nature-themed games with them. We are happy to report that we have extended Ashley's contract through spring 2017 and hope, with your help, to retain her services on a long-term basis.

The Sears Island Stewardship Project

As reported in the 2015 Annual Report, we obtained grants that enabled us to contract with GreenWays Consulting in Belfast to do a Stewardship Land Management and Implementation Plan. Aleta McKeage and Cloe Chunn spearheaded this program, spending the summer identifying and monitoring sensitive sites and eradicating invasive species with the help of many volunteers and “citizen scientists.” The program was a great success, with over 120 hours logged by Field Managers, FOSI volunteers, and students from Unity College, Wheaton College, and Belfast High School. Two students made the Sears Island project the primary focus of their summer internships with the Community Conservation Corps, and they received extensive training as a part of their participation. Aleta and Cloe are now compiling a Stewardship Guide, which will be available to other conservation organizations. Check our website (friendsofsearsisland.org) for details.



Beach yoga class with Missy Hatch.



Island Explorers children's program with Ashley Megquier.



Volunteers remove oriental bittersweet from the island.



FOSI's 10th Anniversary Art Auction.

Updates to our Website

Speaking of our website, take a look at our “virtual” bird walk that Cloe Chunn guided in May. Thanks to Maria Gocze for producing the video, which makes you feel like you are actually there on the walk! You will also notice that our website has many new updates, including an expanded “Explore the Island” section. Thanks to FOSI Advisor Steve Albin for the countless hours he has spent working on it over the past months. We also now have a PowerPoint program available for presentations, thanks to the efforts of FOSI volunteer Alice Seeger and graphic artist Susan Guthrie of High Street Design in Belfast. Finally, we thank Advisors Ann Flack and Tony Kulik for improving our database over the past year.

Collaborations

In 2016, we continued to network with other organizations to expand our outreach. This included co-sponsoring the Penobscot Watershed Conference with 14 other organizations in April, presenting at the Pen Bay Stewards Day in early May, and collaborating with Coastal Mountains Land Trust and the Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition in mid-May on “Discover the Trails of Searsport” day, giving participants a chance to learn more about recreational opportunities in their own backyards.

10th Anniversary Celebration & Benefit Art Auction

FOSI held a well-received art auction in August at the Captain A.V. Nickels Inn in Searsport, which featured works of art from many local artists. This was a successful fundraiser, as well as a very enjoyable evening for all who attended. Our thanks go to Mark and Linda Bradstreet of Downeast Auctions for volunteering their services as auctioneers.

FOSI Board & Advisors 2017

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What's in Store for 2017

We continue to be involved in planning meetings for the Maine Ocean School, a magnet school focusing on marine studies that will be located in Searsport and Stockton Springs. The island offers an ideal site for many educational opportunities, including use as a living laboratory.

Moving forward, some of our plans for 2017 include producing interpretive signs on the island's natural and cultural resources, developing a video documentary on the history of Sears Island, and exploring the possibility of building a handicapped accessible trail.

We want to sincerely thank all of our individual, business, and nonprofit organization members, as well as our dedicated volunteers. We could not do it without you!



Clockwise from the top left:

Students from Unity College work to remove invasive plants, summer interns learn to use a GPS unit, view of the bay and a large tidepool from the end of the Blue Trail, interns measuring a tree in a study plot, starflower, Sara Lindsay teaches walk participants about marine worms.



Have photos of Sears Island you'd like to share?

We are always looking for new images of island scenery, flora and fauna, and your experiences while visiting.

Send your photo submissions to Ashley at: outreach@friendsofsearsisland.org

Financial records available upon request.