



# Sheepscot Log

Newsletter of the Sheepscot Valley Conservation Association

Summer 2011

## Focus on Hockomock Bay



Hockomock Bay is one of the most diverse areas in the Sheepscot watershed consisting of an archipelago of 12 islands and the west-central portion of Westport Island. Photo by Janet McMahon.

In 2008, the SVCA and two neighboring land trusts commissioned Janet McMahon to review the natural resources of the entire Sheepscot River watershed to help the three trusts refine their strategic conservation plans. As there is exciting conservation activity ongoing in Westport (see story on page 3), we thought this a good time to learn more about a nearby focus area assigned to SVCA.

From a biological standpoint, the 1,740-acre Hockomock Bay focus area is one of the most diverse in the watershed, one of two biodiversity “hot spots” of statewide interest in the Sheepscot watershed. The archipelago of 12 islands and the west-central portion of Westport Island from Heal Cove to Squam Creek contains a combination of marine, freshwater and upland habitats that support a rich diversity of plant and animal species, including five that are rare in Maine: the bald eagle, Atlantic salmon, salt marsh sharp-tailed sparrow,

shortnose sturgeon and marsh elder. This focus area is the only known Maine location for marsh elder, a shrub that grows at the high tide line. Small but representative examples of the pitch pine woodland community are found on many of the islands, as well as occurrences of brackish tidal marsh and *Spartina* saltmarsh in protected coves. Other features of note are beautiful stands of mixed conifer forests north of Heal Cove and on Beal Island, the tidal rips at Lower Hell Gate and Little Hell Gate, a sand beach on the south end of Beal Island, Anderson Bog, the salt pond at Squam Creek, which supports horseshoe crabs and quahogs, and many miles of unspoiled shoreline.

There are less than half a dozen camps on the 12 islands, and most are not prominently visible from the water. The islands vary in character from steep rocky shores to low coastline with small pocket marshes tucked into protected coves. The western shores often support stands of pitch pine, while eastern and interior portions support white and red pine, red oak, and red spruce. Typical understory species include bayberry, huckleberry, lowbush blueberry, and bracken fern. Most forest stands appear to be at least 80 years old.



View of Squam Creek from Post Office Road. Photo by Janet McMahon.

South of Post Office Road is an interesting ~100-acre wetland system that includes a fen, beaver flowage, and sedge meadow. This wetland, locally known as Anderson Bog, is surrounded by steep ledges and a healthy riparian forest and is classified as high value waterfowl and wading bird habitat by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

The terrain of the focus area is irregular, with many glacially sculpted bedrock knobs and ledge outcrops. Rocks are extensively deformed and folded schists and gneiss, with an area of granite south of Squam Creek. Of note is

*continued on page 3*

***Our mission is to conserve the natural and historic heritage of the Sheepscot Watershed through land protection, habitat restoration, advocacy, education and support for compatible land uses.***



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*The Sheepscoot Valley*

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*organization.*

## From the President



*Dear Members and Friends,*

*Although it has been a bit warmer than usual here, aren't we lucky to be in Mid Coast Maine this summer? Throughout our beautiful watershed, eaglets, fox kits, recently fledged osprey and turkey chicks are thriving. The Sheepscoot River may be low right now, but it still cools the feet and warms the spirit.*

*Thanks to you, the SVCA is also thriving. Several land protection projects are well underway and will be announced later this year. Our application for Accreditation is almost ready for submission - two three-inch binders FULL of documentation. (See page 6) Thanks to the extraordinary efforts of the staff and Board, especially project manager, Paul Hoffman, I have every confidence that the SVCA will gain accreditation but we will have to wait until next April to find out!*

*Under the leadership of Board member Libby Seigars, the SVCA has recently formalized its Business Partners program. Over the years, we have been fortunate to receive support from members of the business community and now we have a way to better express our appreciation. (See page 7) Given the economic climate, we are thankful to all the businesses in our region for their commitment to the SVCA.*

*The SVCA has also been fortunate this year to receive generous support from two foundations as described on page 6. These grants are especially appreciated given the financial times and will help us move forward on many collaborative efforts that we believe will enhance numerous organizations and projects throughout the watershed.*

*It takes resources from every sector to stay a healthy and active organization and the SVCA is fortunate to have the trust and respect of our community. Your membership and volunteer support, together with business and foundation grants, enables the SVCA to thrive. As always, you have my deepest gratitude.*

*Honor Fox Sage*

## Best of Luck to tish ...

SVCA is sad to announce the recent resignation of tish carr as the SVCA's Lands Director. After more than four years, tish is moving on to another opportunity at McLaughlin Garden in South Paris where she will be managing the visitor center, coordinating volunteers and events and serving as the property's arborist. If you visit the garden, be sure to stop in and say hi.

The SVCA greatly appreciates all of tish's work on our behalf and we wish her the very best in her new endeavors. She will be missed!



*continued from front page*

the Back River Fault, which underlies the Back River. Lenses of pegmatite, a very coarse-grained granite, are common throughout the area. Because bedrock is close to the surface



**Lower Hell Gate is a major thoroughfare for recreational boaters. Photo by Janet McMahon.**

in many areas and the folded rocks create many shallow depressions, there are many vernal pools scattered through the forests surrounding Heal Cove.

Westport's 2002 Comprehensive Plan notes two views from roads in the focus area that were considered particularly scenic: the views north and south of the Squam Creek Dike Bridge and the views from the Heal Cove - Heal Pond Dike Bridge.



**The beach on AMC's Beal Island. Photo by Janet McMahon.**

The area is popular with kayakers, sport fishermen (striper, bluefish), and there is some lobstering. Lower Hell Gate is a major thoroughfare for recreational boaters. Two aquaculture leases are located in Squam Creek and clambers and wormers would use the clam flats but they are currently closed due to pollution from chlorinated discharge systems.

There are a number of properties in conservation ownership, under easement, or that are used for educational purposes, including Beal Island (owned by the Appalachian

Mountain Club), Castle Island and Berry Island (Chewonki Foundation), Erratic Island (state), Hubbard Point (an 82-acre conservation easement held by IFW) and the Bonyun Preserve, (68 acres owned by the Kennebec Estuary Land Trust), located on the west shore of Westport Island across from Beal Island.

## Conservation Activity on Westport Island

The Town of Westport Island is currently working with a number of land trust partners to purchase and conserve a 202-acre parcel of land that includes 2,495 feet of Sheepscot River shorefront, rich wetland habitat areas and extensive forests. A conservation easement will be held by a local land trust (Kennebec Estuary Land Trust or SVCA.)



**Westport Island is currently working to protect a parcel of land to be maintained as undeveloped space for the enjoyment of residents and visitors. Photo courtesy of Dennis Dunbar.**

The Trust for Public Land has lead the effort to raise the grant funds needed to protect this critically important parcel. The land will be maintained as undeveloped open space for the enjoyment of residents and visitors for traditional recreation such as hiking, biking, hunting, fishing, boating, snowmobiling, cross country skiing, skating and wildlife viewing. The Town recently voted to contribute \$75,000 to the project through bonding, a significant vote of support from the residents.

# Sheepscoot River Watershed Council Works to improve Fish Passage and Water Quality

by Charlie Baeder, SRWC Coordinator

The following list shows the current status of the Council's active projects:

- **Pullen Mill** – Working with landowner to construct fish passage improvements at the Pullen Mill, a remnant mill and dam on the West Branch that blocks fish passage for some diadromous fish species such as alewife. Partners: USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service and Maine Department of Marine Resources. We are in the final stages of permitting and hope to complete construction in 2011.

- **Dyer River** – Last summer, the Council worked with SVCA, Maine Department of Environmental Protection and others to identify bacteria and sediment erosion sources in the Dyer River watershed. The Dyer River, in certain sections, does not meet state water quality standards because of elevated bacteria.

We identified several likely sources and will be conducting additional water quality sampling this summer.

- **Kennebec Barrier Survey** – This project is outside the Sheepscoot River watershed but grew out of our work in the Sheepscoot. In the Sheepscoot, we worked with SVCA and Maine Department of Marine Resources to survey fish passage barriers including dams and culverts. Given this experience, we helped organize the Kennebec Barrier Survey in 2010 and are continuing to help manage the project in collaboration with Kennebec Estuary Land Trust and Kennebec County Soil & Water Conservation District. These barrier inventory projects are of regional significance as many of the fish that use the Kennebec system also use the Sheepscoot system.



Measuring culverts as part of the Sheepscoot Barrier Survey.



Some culverts become barriers to fish passage.

- **Muscongus Culvert Replacement Project** Following the Sheepscoot Barrier Survey, the Council contacted the Maine Department of Transportation to discuss possible projects in the Sheepscoot watershed. The project that was most feasible from a funding and current need basis was not in the Sheepscoot watershed but in Bremen, one watershed east of Damariscotta. We decided to help organize funding to restore alewife passage on Muscongus Brook, for its own merits, and to build a good working relationship with MDOT. NOAA, American Rivers, the Gulf of Maine Council, KCSWCD and MNRCP, in addition to MDOT, are active partners in this project. Design work is ongoing and it is expected that construction will be completed by 2012.

As you can see from this list of projects, we have been busy this last year working to address fish passage and water quality issues in the Sheepscoot and in adjacent watersheds. With a focus on the Sheepscoot, we plan to continue to initiate similar projects in the future. Anyone who is interested in attending our meetings, or in pitching in to help tackle these or other projects is strongly encouraged to join us. The next meeting will be in early fall.

## Returning Salmon caught in Smolt Trap at Head Tide

Every spring, NOAA and the Maine Department of Marine Resources Bureau of Sea Run Fisheries (DMR) place traps in the Sheepscot River just downstream of the Head Tide Dam to survey the number of one year old salmon, called smolts, traveling downstream to the ocean. Scientists visit the site every morning and unload the live-trap to count all of the contents and release them on their journey. They measure, weigh and take scale samples of any salmon.



This year they counted 515 smolts and for the first time, they discovered a returning adult salmon in the trap (pictured above.) Due to the markings, Paul Christman at DMR could tell that this was a hatchery-raised fish that was released as a parr in 2008 and migrated downstream through the trap in 2010. While most salmon spend two winters at sea before returning to their home river to spawn, this small adult was a grilse, a fish that only spent one winter at sea. Good luck to him on his future voyage!

### Sheepscot Salmon Club makes final Donation

Recently, the Sheepscot River Salmon Club disbanded and made a final donation to the SVCA of \$1,000. We at the SVCA want to thank the Club members for their generosity and will use the funds in our work to improve conditions for salmon survival in the Sheepscot River.

## Anticipated merger of SVCA and SRWC

Over a year ago members of the boards and staffs of SVCA and the Sheepscot River Watershed Council (SRWC) began conversations about the possibility of a merger of the two organizations. SRWC is one of only two remaining councils from those created under Gov. King in the late 1990's, in the early days of the process aimed at listing the Atlantic salmon "races" associated with 8 Maine rivers, including the Sheepscot, as endangered species. The SVCA was a charter member of the Council, provided the first Council Chair, and indeed the first staff for the Council worked part-time for both the Council and the SVCA.

Over its life SRWC has found money for and accomplished much valuable work in our watershed, including pollution source surveys, culvert assessments and repairs aimed at easing fish passage and hosting discussions of the pros and cons of existing dams along the river, such as those at Head Tide and Coopers Mills.

For the past several years, as the operations and staff of the Council have become smaller, SVCA has acted as fiscal agent or partner, managing the grants that have supported the Council's work. The success of this cooperation was a major factor in suggesting the possibility that a full merger could make sense, and the discussion became more serious in September of 2010. Meetings continued and at the meeting of May 31st, it was agreed that Don Hudson, Chair of the SRWC Board and Cliff Russell would produce a memorandum of understanding defining the terms of the merger, to be voted on by the two Boards in the fall.

From SVCA's perspective, the merger will bring us a small but well regarded river quality protection and stream restoration program that will complement our land preservation and management work, especially as so much of the Council's work has been aimed at creating the physical and water quality conditions necessary to support a successful re-establishment of salmon runs.

Two important things the merger will not bring us are debts and new staff. The continuation of the Council's work will be undertaken as agency or private funding is found to support the hiring of consultants and will be overseen by a new SVCA committee to include representatives of both current boards. This committee will have the responsibility for overseeing the process and vouching for the outcomes.

# Public comment period on SVCA's Accreditation application now open

The Sheepscot Valley Conservation Association, based in Newcastle, has announced that it is applying for accreditation by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. The Commission's accreditation program recognizes land conservation organizations that meet quality standards in their efforts to permanently protect important natural places and working lands. A public comment period on SVCA's application is now open.



**Paul Hoffman with copies of SVCA's application for land trust accreditation!**

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission is an independent program of the national land trust association, the Land Trust Alliance. The Commission conducts an extensive review of each applicant's policies, programs, and practices. SVCA's principal purpose in applying for accreditation is to confirm that it is adhering to national quality standards, and to ensure thereby its long-term ability to service and monitor the properties and easements that have been entrusted to it.

The Commission invites public input and accepts signed, written comments on pending applications. Comments must relate to how SVCA complies with national quality standards for ethical and technical operation of a land trust. For the full list of standards see [www.landtrustaccreditation.org/getting-accredited/indicator-practices](http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org/getting-accredited/indicator-practices).

To learn more about the accreditation program or to submit a comment, visit [www.landtrustaccreditation.org](http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org). Comments may also be faxed or mailed to the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, Attn: Public Comments: (fax) 518-587-3183; (mail) 112 Spring Street, Suite 204, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866. Comments on the SVCA application will be most useful if received by January 1, 2012.

## SVCA receives two Grants

The Elmina B. Sewall Foundation and the Doree Taylor Charitable Foundation recently each awarded \$20,000 to the SVCA in support of our mission and specifically our efforts to achieve accreditation and to foster collaboration among local land trusts and environmental organizations. The Sewall Foundation "strives to enhance the quality of life for those in Maine through the conservation of the natural environment and support for the well being of animals and humans." The Taylor Foundation was established by the estate of Doree Taylor, a longtime Southport resident, and provides support to charitable organizations in the area.

We are grateful to both Foundations for their support and will use the funds to further discussions with groups such as the Sheepscot River Watershed Council and the 12 Rivers Collaborative.

## SVCA Raffle for a "Beginning Birder Package\*"



Great for any nature lover! Package includes:

- Pair of new 8 x 40 Nikon Binoculars
- Gently used Alpen 15-45 x 60 Spotting Scope
- "Peterson Field Guide to Birds"
- "Best Nature Sites Midcoast Maine"
- "On the Trail in Lincoln County"
- Tote bag to carry it all!

**1 ticket for \$1.00 or 6 for \$5.00**

*Drawing on December 10, 2011 at SVCA's annual meeting & holiday party in Sheepscot Village. Winner need not be present - will ship to U.S. address. \*Retail value \$300. Call 586-5616 for tickets.*

# Ames True Value Hardware & Supply of Wiscasset Adopts Bass Falls Preserve



SVCA's volunteer preserve steward, Chris Kenoyer (left) with Jeff Averill from Ames True Value Hardware & Supply in Wiscasset.

As part of SVCA's new Adopt-A-Preserve Program, Ames True Value Hardware & Supply is sponsoring SVCA's Bass Falls Preserve in Alna with a generous \$500 donation. The annual donation supports maintenance of the kiosk and the parking lot as well as staff time needed to oversee the wonderful volunteer efforts in maintaining the trails.

We are so grateful to Ames for their continued support. If you are visiting their Wiscasset store, please be sure to tell them thanks! If your business or group would like to adopt a preserve, please contact Kristin at 586-5616. The SVCA has 7 public preserves in Alna(2), Jefferson, Newcastle(2), Palermo and Whitefield.

## Youth Summit workers lend a helping hand at SVCA

This past Spring SVCA was fortunate to host students from several midcoast area schools in many grades during their community service Youth Summit. Three groups of students assisted with maintenance projects on two of SVCA's preserves and at the office in Sheepscot.

Groups at the Griggs and Marsh River Preserves built bog bridges and mitigated soil erosion issues on the trails. The group at the office did everything from raking leaves, weeding the flower bed, washing and installing screens for the summer and painting the office!

We are so grateful for their (and their teachers!) energy, enthusiasm and hard work.

**THANK YOU ALL!**



The volunteer crew at the SVCA office. Front l-r: Baylea, Rhenna, Duncan, Griffin, J.J. Back: Darek, Matt, Becca, Ashley, Phillip and Tabetha.



## Sheepscot Bog Paddle in Palermo Saturday, October 1 10:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

The bog, accessible from the southeast corner of Sheepscot Pond, is a mosaic of many wetland types, encompassing 1,300 acres. We will paddle into the bog's remote and quiet interior that includes a large kettle pond. Co-sponsored by the Sheepscot Wellspring Land Alliance.

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*Protecting over 3,540 acres of land through purchases and conservation easements, including 15 miles of Sheepscot River frontage.*

## Upcoming Events

**Champagne on the Sheepscot Fundraiser**  
Saturday, September 10 5:00 - 7:00 p.m.

**Whitefield Salmon Preserve Nature Walk**  
Wednesday, September 14 10:00 a.m.

**SVCA at the Common Ground Fair**  
Friday, September 23 - Sunday, Sept. 26

**Sheepscot Bog Paddle co-sponsored by  
Sheepscot Wellspring Land Alliance**  
Saturday, October 1 10:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

**Palermo Preserve Nature Walk**  
Sunday, October 23 10:00 a.m.

**Volunteer Appreciation Brunch**  
Saturday, November 5 10:00 a.m.

**Annual Meeting & Holiday Potluck\***  
Saturday, December 10 4:00 - 7:00 p.m.

*\*Drawing for raffle winner*

## People's Choice Photo Contest Deadline Approaching!

Cash prizes of  
\$100, \$50 and \$25

**Entries due by  
August 30, 2011**

Winners chosen on  
September 10  
at "Champagne on the  
Sheepscot"



*"Calm Before the Storm" by Katherine Davis*

Enter your favorite image(s) of the flora, fauna, landscapes, people or communities of the Sheepscot River Valley

- Two entries per person, color or black and white, any format (preferably 8 x 10), must be mounted on 9 x 11 foam core (3/16" thick), preferably shrink-wrapped.
- Title of image and photographer's name, address, phone number and e-mail address must be printed legibly on back.
- All images may be used by SVCA, with attribution.

**For more information about our events call the office at (207) 586-5616 or email [svca@sheepscot.org](mailto:svca@sheepscot.org)**