



Friends of Ellisville Marsh Newsletter

December, 2015

This newsletter is produced on a periodic basis to keep members of the Friends of Ellisville Marsh, Inc., apprised of developments and opportunities to become involved.

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The Tax Year is About to Close

If you haven't done so already, please renew your membership with the Friends and even consider a year-end, tax-deductible gift.

It's easy.

Just visit us at <http://tinyurl.com/Donate-to-Ellisville-Marsh>

Our federal tax ID is 77-0691727

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

The joys of summer are a fading memory and we are all preparing for what is forecasted to be another 'Real' New England Winter. I doubt it will be the epic 100-year snowfall of last year, but I feel sure we will see many a day when it will be hard to remember that we were swimming in the ocean just a few months ago! Our Ellisville volunteers joyously nurtured our three plover chicks until they were ready to fly on their own, called 'fledging'. It is something everyone who uses Ellisville beach should be proud of – owners and visitors. We've all learned an incredible amount from these birds and how their care is a surrogate for good stewardship of our rapidly disappearing wild shore lands. All of the flora and fauna make up an incredibly interwoven masterpiece that makes the shore a place that has drawn humanity for millennia. We at the Friends of Ellisville Marsh not only appreciate our membership's incredible generosity over these past five years, but your willingness to learn about this area, its natural inhabitants, and your readiness to participate and support its preservation – for ourselves, our children, and our children's children. Thank you and have a wonderful holiday Season!

Jack Scambos

President

A Highly Successful Summer Season

The Friends' project to restore fisheries and wildlife at Ellisville Marsh is necessarily focused on the summer season. Virtually all of our environmental monitoring programs—nesting shorebirds, salt marsh vegetation, water quality, eel grass mapping and others—take place during the warmer months, when this unique coastal habitat is brimming with vitality and new life. Summer of 2015 was no exception. Our volunteers and summer intern (see separate piece) spent many hours gathering data that will help us better understand the trends in environmental conditions and inform our activities.

While we had only one nesting pair of Piping Plovers (Ellisville Beach has hosted as many as four pairs in past years), three chicks hatched and survived the 25 days necessary to fledge. It was touch and go for several weeks. High tides came within inches of over-washing the nest, predators took a Least Tern nest within 50 yards of the Plover nest, and the beach

was crowded with beachgoers during hot weekends throughout July. Thanks largely to the diligent efforts of their parent, nicknamed Muttonchops for his distinctive neck band, three chicks fledged. This was our most successful result in years!



Muttonchops and 13-day-old chicks the week after the Fourth of July. His mate was very shy and rarely seen after the eggs hatched. Photo by Diane Fletcher © 2015. All rights reserved.

Feedback from Our 2015 Environmental Monitoring Intern

Abby Foley, who has summered in Ellisville her whole life, was selected by the Friends as the 2015 Environmental Monitoring Intern in July. Here are her reflections on the internship experience:

This summer I worked as Friends of Ellisville Marsh's field monitoring intern. The tasks I had to accomplish throughout the summer included deploying data loggers in three locations to measure tidal elevations, surveying vegetation plots in the marsh, and entering data to add to a portfolio of records from past summers.

The early morning I deployed the bay logger the water was freezing and I had to use goggles and a mask to see underwater in order to screw the stilling well containing the logger to an anchor. That morning there were hundreds of starfish that I had fun observing out front. I also found a huge Striper head on the beach, which I took home intending to dissect. I think it is still in our freezer...Another day, I put a stilling well and logger inside an old, unused lobster trap buried under rocks and seaweed in the channel. When I removed this logger at the end of the summer I had quite a surprise. I pulled the stilling well out of the trap and a huge eel that made the sheltered trap its home slithered out and startled me!

The last logger and stilling well I placed was in the marsh. While we were out there putting a new logger in I had to dive deep in a channel with goggles to try to retrieve a lost logger from last summer that was stuck in marsh mud.

The vegetation survey work was a learning experience for me. By the end of the summer I could identify most herbaceous marsh plants, which will surely help with my aquatic botany class I am

taking next semester. I learned how to navigate the marsh and avoid the treacherous quick-sand-like mud with help from my supervisor/mom.

Lastly, the data entry portion of the internship was the least interesting and lacked the physical challenge, but inputting all the information I collected over three months was very satisfying and cool to see in an Excel spreadsheet. I am so thankful to the Friends of Ellisville Marsh for giving me the opportunity to get hands-on learning in the marine biology field I intend to continue studying throughout my undergraduate program. The field experience is especially valuable to me and I hope to continue applying what I have learned in my marine science classes at UNH.



Friends' Intern Abby Foley and her Striper head. Photo courtesy of Ellen Russell.

We were lucky to have you, Abby! And your supervisor/mom too.

Savery Pond Monitoring Plan Takes Shape

If you follow Herring Brook upstream from Ellisville Marsh toward the top of the watershed, you soon come to lovely, spring-fed Savery Pond. With its tree-lined shores and sparse development, Savery seems isolated from pollutants, sparkling, and pristine. *Unless* you have visited in the heat of summer in the last few years, when it has shown a very different face. Indeed, the Department of Public Health has closed the pond repeatedly and protractedly because of dangerous levels of toxic blue-green algae (cyanobacteria).

Even so, it was a wake-up call this year when a study published by the Town of Plymouth found that Savery's levels of nitrogen and phosphorous—the compounds that lead to algal blooms — were significantly higher than every other tested pond in town – literally *off the charts* for the graphs used to plot the data.



Savery Pond. Photos courtesy of Thomas Harter. © 2015 All rights reserved.

As this issue has come to light over the past five years, FEM has been monitoring water quality; now we are concerned enough about the health of the pond (and its downstream neighbor, Ellisville Marsh) to launch a new "Savery Pond Initiative". We are working with the Cape Cod Cranberry Growers Association, UMASS Cranberry Experimental Station, Town of Plymouth, School for Marine Science and Technology at UMass Dartmouth, the US Department of Agriculture and a neighboring cranberry bog operator to understand the causes of the problem and weigh possible remedies.

Under the leadership of Friends' board member Peter Schwartzman, a plan for monitoring water quality at Savery Pond is under development, and grant funding is being sought for a season of intensive sampling.

How can *you* help? Click on the link below to learn about Savery Pond and the Friends' efforts to understand and fight its nutrient problem. You can sign up to receive updates, get involved with sampling, and even donate funds specifically to help out! <http://tinyurl.com/Savery-Pond>

Canadian Film Crew Documents Friends' Work

The Arcadia Content film company out of Halifax, Nova Scotia came to Ellisville in July 2015 to interview Friends of Ellisville Marsh representatives regarding Ellisville Marsh. The company plans to release an aerial photographic documentary of the United States Atlantic coastline entitled, "America Over the Edge", which may or may not include Ellisville Marsh (depending on the amount of editing). Actual flyover of the area took place this past October. (You may have noticed their helicopter flying less than fifty feet above the beach with what looked like a forward gun mount!) The company has produced a similar series on the Canadian coastline and if you have the chance, check out the beautiful coastline footage in their series, "Canada Over the Edge" (Seasons 1 through 4). A brief interview and demonstration was conducted with board members Ellen Russell and Paula Marcoux about the area's history and the ongoing research and monitoring of Ellisville's tiny coastline. We'll be looking for our copy of the DVD this coming March!



Board member Ellen Russell sets up with Canadian film crew in July.

Photo courtesy of Paula Marcoux.
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Permitting Update

2015 has also been an active year on the regulatory front. We received a five-year extension to our existing Water Quality Permit (officially known as a Section 401 water quality certification) from the Mass DEP. This permit is good until mid-2020. However, our concurrent application to the US Army Corps of Engineers for a new General Permit (GP), submitted in May, has languished. The initial GP issued to us in 2010 expired in January. We have recently been informed by the Corps that review of the permit application is in progress. Fingers crossed that we'll receive the new permit in time to perform inlet maintenance in early 2016 if the need arises.



Seagulls bask in the just-reopened Ellisville inlet, March 2015.
Photo by Diane Fletcher © 2015. All rights reserved.