

Friends of Sears Island 2019 Annual Report

PUBLISHED JANUARY 2020



HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2019

As one decade ends and we look ahead to the next, we feel a great sense of accomplishment and gratitude for the ways that FOSI has grown, and for the support that has made it all possible. 2019 was another prosperous year for FOSI. We offered 23 events, with 750 attendees. Our programming included summer and winter Solstice by the Sea celebrations, wildlife track and sign programs, monarch tagging, vernal pool exploration, nature journaling, yoga on the beach, various birding events, a phenology (signs of the seasons) talk, an intertidal exploration, and more!

Not only did we stay true to our mission of offering free, educational programming to the public, but we also were re-selected by the Maine Department of Transportation as the Land Management Entity to oversee, advise, and manage the 601-acre Conservation Area protected by an easement for another three-year period. This agreement was signed in August.

We've always had a sense that thousands of people visit Sears Island each year, but this year we got proof! Using a traffic counter installed on Sears Island Road, provided by Maine DOT, we discovered that more than 20,500 cars visited Sears Island from May 20 to September 26 – an average of nearly 1,100 cars per week. Sears Island truly is a midcoast gem that draws visitors from near and far to enjoy meaningful experiences in nature. We are proud to serve as stewards to the island and to host educational programs that inspire others to care for and connect with this special place.

Science Squad Update

With a generous gift from Sprague- operator of Searsport's Mack Point cargo terminal, neighboring Sears Island- FOSI was able to continue our successful Science Squad after-school program in 2019. Over the course of the year, we held 8 programs for families, serving 182 participants. Some of our most popular Science Squad events included animal winter survival strategies, wildlife tracking on Sears Island, monarch tagging, and a backyard birding program. In July, we held a special summer vacation Science Squad event, a nature treasure hunt on Sears Island, and WABI News came and did a story on our program. We plan to continue Science Squad in 2020, and are currently seeking funding to support piloting a preschool-aged offshoot of this program for parents and children ages 2-5. Look for registration information on our winter Science Squad programs soon, including an environmental film festival for kids and an afternoon of mad science experiments!



A child assembles an outdoor "museum" display after going on a nature treasure hunt.



Kids examine animal footprints on the beach during a winter tracking hike.



Island News

It's been a busy year of island maintenance and we are so grateful to all of the volunteers who have offered their time and tools to keep Sears Island accessible for public recreation! Recent projects have included making the ramp to the eastern beach more slip-resistant, re-painting the kiosk, removing a large tire and other trash from the beaches, and raking, mowing, and bush hogging the trails during the summer months to keep them passable. We are regularly monitoring the trails, but if you are hiking on the island and see something that needs fixing or improving, let us know!



FOSI Welcomes New Treasurer

After a search to replace former treasurer Brian Callahan, who stepped down from the board in October, Jim Gilbert of Winterport was selected to be FOSI's new treasurer. He began his duties in mid-November.

Jim worked in the Wildlife Ecology Department at the University of Maine in Orono for 37 years, with his research focusing on marine mammals. He also has been involved in several nonprofit organizations, served as treasurer of the Cove Brook Watershed Council for five years, and is a member of the Winterport Planning Board (since 2006). In addition, Jim has been a member of many state and national task forces, committees, and working groups, where he reviewed scientific research and provided advice on state and national marine resource policy. We are very pleased that Jim has joined the FOSI management team!

Working with our Maine Legislators

Since the conservation easement was put in place in 2009, Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) has been FOSI's principal partner in the management of Sears Island. FOSI has primary responsibility for managing the 601-acre conservation area—and MDOT has jurisdiction over the remaining 335 acres, which are reserved for possible future transportation uses.

FOSI's executive committee met with Waldo County's Senator Erin Herbig and Representative Scott Cuddy to explore the possibility of bringing other state resources to bear on Sears Island. Senator Herbig next came to Searsport to meet with FOSI's board and advisory group to hear our questions and concerns. With assistance from Senator Herbig's legislative aide Ursa Beckford, FOSI President Susan White and Vice President Rolf Olsen met with Andy Cutko, director of the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands, and members of his staff. It's clear there are possible opportunities to bring both expertise and funding to Sears Island to help achieve some of our longer-term goals, including a handicap-accessible trail, a visitor center with restroom facilities, and other improvements.



FOSI staff, board, and advisory group members with State Senator Erin Herbig.

FOSI Board & Advisors 2020

Board of Directors

President

Susan K. White

Vice President

Rolf Olsen

Secretary

Janet Williams

Treasurer

Jim Gilbert

Steve Bulloch

Rob Burke

Sandi Cirillo

Pat Gladding

David Italiaander

Bob Ramsdell

Marietta Ramsdell, *Emeritus*

Advisory Group

Steve Albin

Mayo Bulloch

Cloe Chunn

Judy Kaiser

Marge Knuuti

Bill Kulbe

Jill Kulbe

Tom Mullin

New Signs Coming This Spring

Have you ever been a little confused about where a trail begins or ends, or just where you are on Sears Island? Would you like to learn more about some of the island's natural or historical features? FOSI has received financial support from the Town of Searsport, the GBL Charitable Foundation, and a Maine Community Foundation Community Building Grant to create new navigational and interpretive signage on Sears Island. We held a public meeting last fall and conducted an online survey to learn more about what visitors to the island would like to see. Watch for a new and improved information kiosk and trail signs this spring!

Boy Scout Builds Stairs to Sears Island Beach

Matthew Southard, a senior at Hampden Academy and member of Boy Scout Troop #34 (Frankfort and Winterport), is building a stairway to the western beach on Sears Island for his Eagle Scout project. Joe Dargin, scoutmaster and a contractor, helped design the stairs. Heavy foot traffic on the path to the beach over the years has eroded the bank, making this access unsafe.

FOSI received a permit from Maine Department of Environmental Protection and permission from Maine Department of Transportation to build the stairs this fall, but scheduling conflicts and uncooperative weather made it impossible to install the stairs before winter weather set in. The stairs are being partially built in Matthew's garage this winter and will be installed in early spring. We are very grateful to Viking Lumber and Building Supplies in Belfast, a FOSI business member that generously donated the materials for the project.

Hunting Policy Revised this Year

After lengthy discussions with Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife biologists and the Searsport Police Department, the FOSI board adopted a hunting policy which keeps the island open to legal hunting but also helps ensure the safety of visitors. The board wrestled with this issue for over a year, after we became aware that coyote hunting is permitted year-round, and families visiting the island in the summer were not expecting or prepared to meet coyote hunters (with their guns and hunting dogs) on the trails.

Historically, Sears Island has been open to hunting during the traditional "deer season," mainly in November. We always posted signs on the island and on our website and Facebook page, alerting visitors to this and advising them to wear blaze orange and stay on the trails. No one was prepared to have hunters out there all year long.

The revised hunting policy is: "From October 1 through December 31 only, all forms of legal hunting are permitted on Sears Island." This means that for nine months a year, no hunting of any species is permitted on the island—and that during the three months when it is permitted, hunters must follow Maine hunting laws.



From top to bottom: Missy Hatch leads a beach yoga class, musicians playing at the summer solstice celebration, people gathered at FOSI's winter Solstice by the Sea.

Common Cents: Many Thanks to Belfast Co-op and Shoppers



FOSI staff, board, and advisory group members accept Common Cents donation from Belfast Co-op staff.

For the first time, FOSI was chosen as one of twelve nonprofits to benefit from the Belfast Co-op's "Common Cents" round up program during 2019. Throughout the month of August, Co-op shoppers rounded up to the next whole dollar, and the total received by FOSI was \$4,197.92! Many thanks to the Belfast Co-op grocery store and café for offering this wonderful program, and to all the Co-op shoppers who chose to round up for FOSI.

Successful Hichborn Raffle

Charlie Zorich and Kirk Linder, owners of The Hichborn restaurant in Stockton Springs, donated a \$350 gift card that FOSI volunteers raffled off in August and early September. We leveraged this very generous donation to raise more than \$2,500 for FOSI, and the winning ticket was drawn on September 6, on the Sears Island causeway by two completely objective visitors. Summer and Anthony Gerson, visiting from Teaneck, NH, drew the winning ticket, which had been purchased by Joanne McNally. Second prize of a \$25 gift certificate, donated by Belfast's Ocean's Edge Restaurant, was won by Trina Dykstra. Thanks to all who purchased tickets!

Thank You to our Business Partners

We are pleased to report continuing and increasing support from our region's business community. GAC Chemical and Sprague – Sears Island's two closest neighbors – have provided leadership funding in support of FOSI's mission. Belfast's Front Street Shipyard generously doubled their annual gift this year. Viking Lumber has contributed to FOSI for several years, and this year donated materials for the construction of a new stairway to the western shore (coming next spring). Several restaurants – including Delvino's, Harborwalk, Ocean's Edge at Fireside Inn & Suites– have participated in special nights when 10% of all diners' tabs are donated to FOSI. Searsport's Grasshopper Shop has donated a portion of sales to FOSI from a Saturday in November. The Belfast Harbor Inn and Searsport's Yardarm Motel have provided important support. We are grateful to our community's business leaders who support FOSI's work and mission.

Thank You to our Volunteers

FOSI is a volunteer-run organization and we wouldn't be able to do what we do without the support of many dedicated individuals. We were able to track over 2,000 volunteer hours in 2019! We are incredibly grateful to everyone who gave their time to FOSI this year. We have tried our best to include everyone who volunteered their time this year- if we have forgotten anyone, we sincerely apologize and hope you'll let us know!

Steve Albin	David Italiaander
Al Andrews	Judy Kaiser
Debra Atwood	Marge Knuuti
Randal Atwood	Bill Kulbe
Karen Broshears	Jill Kulbe
Michael Broshears	Sam Langlois
Mayo Bulloch	Tom Mullin
Steve Bulloch	Timothy Nason
Rob Burke	Rolf Olsen
Sally Burke	Bob Ramsdell
Brian Callahan	Laurie Schweikert
Cloe Chunn	Mike Shannon
Sandi Cirillo	Robin Tara
Serena Cole	Debra Tasker
Jessica Corson	Lisanne Tholl
Nicole Crocker	John Tipping
Nathan Curtis	Christine Varisco
Derek Dunbar	Susan K. White
Danielle Gagnon	Janet Williams
Jim Gilbert	James Wilson
Pat Gladding	
Missy Hatch	

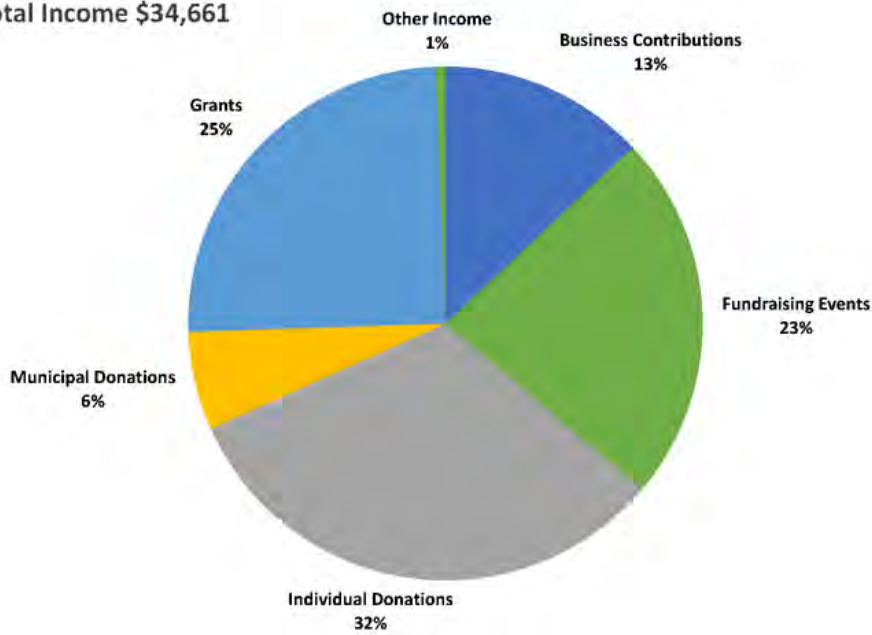


How to Get Involved

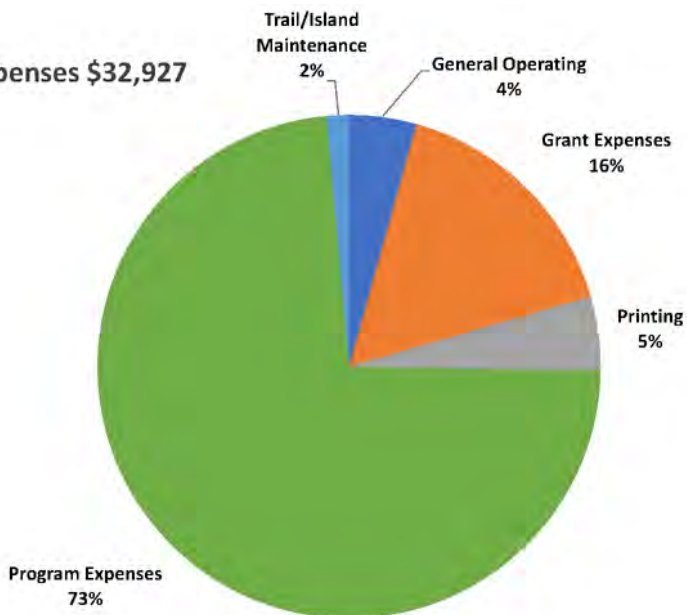
FOSI's board meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month, from 1:30pm-3:00pm in the Stephen Phillips Memorial Library at the Penobscot Marine Museum in Searsport. These meetings are open to the public and we encourage anyone who is interested in learning more about our organization and potentially getting involved to join us! We are currently seeking new board and advisory group candidates. There are many other ways to become involved with FOSI as well. If you are interested in learning more about our volunteer opportunities, please contact Ashley at outreach@friendsofsearsisland.org.

Friends of Sears Island Income and Expenditures 2019

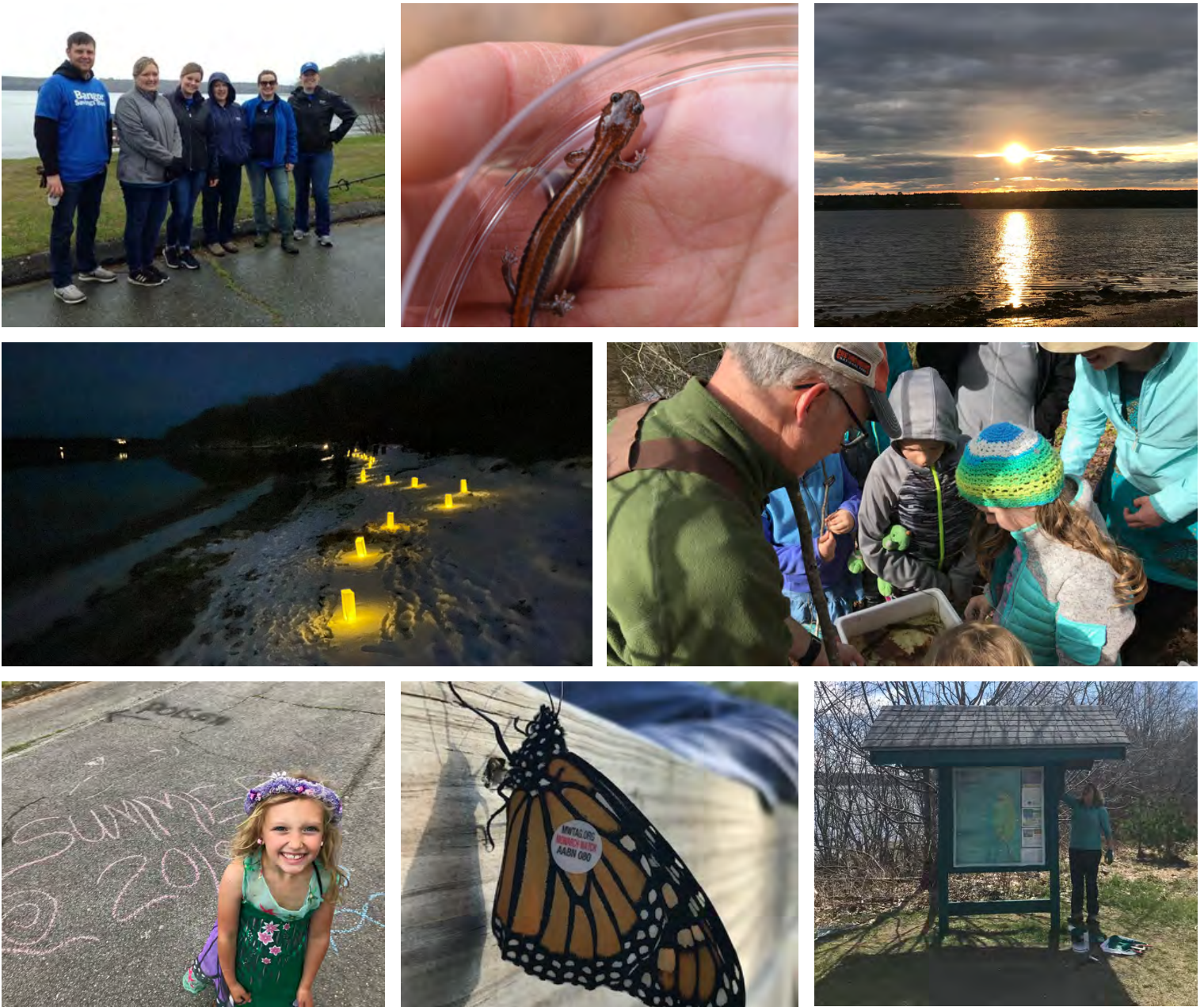
Total Income \$34,661



Total Expenses \$32,927



From top to bottom: A child draws with sidewalk chalk at the summer solstice, Mike Shannon leads a program on the forested landscape, new treads on the ramp to the eastern beach.



Clockwise, left to right, from top: Bangor Savings Bank employees volunteer on Sears Island for the United Way Day of Caring in May, a red-backed salamander found near the vernal pool on Sears Island, the sunset from Sears Island on the summer solstice, John Tipping helps children identify aquatic organisms from the vernal pool, a volunteer repaints the kiosk during FOSI's Spring Clean-up Day, a tagged monarch butterfly for the Monarch Watch program, a child celebrates at Solstice by the Sea in June, luminarias along the eastern beach at the winter Solstice by the Sea.



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