

McGrath Pond-Salmon Lake Association

Fall/Winter 2025 Newsletter

Editor's Corner

As you likely know, 2025 brought us a parched summer after a rainy spring. Dry conditions have continued into the fall, and all of Maine is experiencing some measure of drought. In late November, as I finish up this edition of the *Newsletter*, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has declared Maine's drought a natural disaster, with Kennebec County one of the six listed as most affected and first eligible for aid under its programs.

This past warm season, lake level stayed high into mid-summer but then began its slow-but-steady retreat as outflow and evaporation exceeded meager offerings from above and what was left from surface streams and shallow groundwater. By early October, when draw-down for winter conditions normally begins, there wasn't much drawing down to be done.

Salmon Lake remained quite clear right through July, then water clarity slowly declined through August and September, reaching a Secchi disc reading of 3.80 m/12.5 ft on October 12th. That's actually not bad for this lake in mid-October. Many past years, Salmon has suffered an algae bloom in late summer or early fall that brought the reading below two meters.

McGrath Pond's clarity shadowed Salmon's through most of the summer and early fall, just a little bit better at each bi-weekly sample, then dropped quite low at the reading on October 12th: 3.15 m/10.3 ft. In fact, McGrath Pond's clarity declined notably beginning in early September, and we don't know why. It certainly wasn't due to an inflow of phosphorus from heavy down-pours, as skies remained clear through the period. This is a conundrum and will be cause concern if repeated.

Some good news to share on the water-quality front is that MPSLA and 7 Lakes Alliance have been awarded another Clean Water Act Section 319 Grant for erosion-control work in our watershed. The third such two-year grant to come our way in recent years, it's used primarily to contain runoff from camp roads and driveways, based on needs identified in our 2017 Watershed Survey and 2018 Watershed-Based Protection Plan. Awarded by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, the grant is funded by the federal EPA, which, so far, continues to provide funds. Thanks to Lynn Geiger at 7 Lakes for submitting the successful application.

To qualify for these DEP/EPA grants, we are required to do a thorough watershed survey and develop a watershed-based protection plan based on it every decade. The watershed survey identifies runoff problems in the watershed and is a large undertaking that involves considerable advance planning and organization, including communicating with all shorefront property owners around both lakes. The survey requires the work of many volunteers just like you and several professionals. It takes boots on the ground and butts in chairs looking at screens. It requires coffee, donuts, and dollars, plus quite a few meetings of our folks, 7 Lakes Alliance staff, DEP staff, and possibly an outside consultant. You'll hear more about the next watershed survey as we get geared up to do it during 2027.

Of course, the purpose of the watershed survey, protection plan, and Section 319 grants is to minimize nutrients getting into the lakes as a result of human development. Even better than that is to preserve land from development, either through donation of the land itself or through conservation

easements held by a certified land trust such as 7 Lakes Alliance.

It's difficult to generalize, but the rule of thumb is that developed property with a home or camp plus human activity contributes about ten times as much phosphorus to a water body as a comparable undeveloped one. Currently, 7 Lakes owns the Narrows Preserve on the east side of The Narrows, which is contiguous with a large conservation easement 7 Lakes holds on property to the south, purchased in 1989 by Dr. Joseph Sataloff. Both properties run from the shore up to Town Farm Road.

7 Lakes Alliance's conserved properties, totaling about 9,000 acres, whether by in-fee ownership or conservation easement, are predominantly in the western part of the Belgrade Lakes watershed, and it has recently undertaken an initiative to rectify that imbalance. Hence, there's significant interest in increasing holdings around our lakes.

MPSLA has thus established a Land

Conservation Committee to identify likely properties and work with landowners. Look for an article in the Spring/Summer issue of this Newsletter about how conserving land to protect our lakes can be an attractive proposition for property owners. If you would like more information while you wait for that article, Noah Pollack (noah.pollock@7lakesalliance.org) at 7 Lakes Alliance is an excellent resource.

Finally, for a nice visual treat as we head into the colder, snowier months, let us take you back to the sunny, warm days of mid-to-late summer. It's August 7th, to be exact, between 6:00 and 7:30 pm, still light outside, of course, and we're observing the MPSLA Annual Meeting, courtesy of photos by Board of Directors member David Sandmel. That comes next, and I hope you enjoy reliving those moments.

All the Best,

Lenny Reich

Editor

lsreich@colby.edu



Loon with chick on Salmon Lake

Photo by Rob True

MPSLA ANNUAL MEETING, AUGUST 7TH, 2025, 6:00-7:30 PM
PLEASANT POINT PARK, OAKLAND

PHOTOS BY DAVID SANDMEL



Those attending the meeting sat in their own chairs and on the bleachers on the edge of the town ballfield.



Cam McCafferty gives a report and answers questions on changing water levels in the lakes and control of the dam.



MPSLA Board member Bob Merrill later gave his report on our Courtesy Boat Inspection operation at the Salmon Lake launch. Kim Hallee promoted our important LakeSmart program, run by herself and her husband, Dave.



Dave Hallee gives the Water Quality report. Dave, often with the help of his wife Kim, takes Secchi Disc readings of the two lakes every other week from May into October. Those readings measure lake water clarity.



Mike Giggey, a member who is an environmental engineer, gives a report on MPSLA's work to resolve some of the issues concerning PFAS and other contaminants leaching into McGrath Pond. For further information, see our last three Newsletters.



MPSLA Secretary Robyn Deveney takes minutes of the Annual Meeting in progress.



Julie Martin accepts a coveted LakeSmart award for Ann Mergerian and family, who were unable to attend.



Mal Dawson (left) and MPSLA Treasurer Don Clark, both former Camp Kennebecers (notice hats), accept their LakeSmart awards.



Geologist Mel Croft gave our final presentation of the evening, explaining how the land and lakes of the Belgrade Lakes region evolved over millions and billions of years.

= LAKESMART UPDATE 2025 =

Kim & Dave Hallee

Climate change is beginning to make our jobs of protecting Maine lakes more difficult. More intense rain and ice storms, severe winds, floods, and droughts have a greater impact on our lakefront properties than they do in most other parts of the landscape. The additional phosphorus-laden runoff, potential tree and shoreline loss offer greater challenges. The increased numbers and severity of significant weather events compounded by the impacts of human activities in the developed footprints of our homes and camps create just conditions in our lakes that we lakeshore dwellers want to avoid, and, sadly, the situation is likely to get worse as temperatures rise through the 21st century.

In light of these growing problems and as the understanding of environmental impacts on watershed systems increases, LakeSmart evaluations have been updated and made more rigorous.

LakeSmart is an education and award program that originated in the Maine DEP many years ago and is now run by the statewide organization Maine Lakes, primarily through evaluators in local lake associations. The evaluators, when requested, help home- and camp-owners prevent runoff containing pollution and eroded soils from entering the lakes, preserving water quality and property values. In the process of doing this, owners usually also beautify their property, a nice win-win proposition.

LakeSmart evaluators now carefully examine the following aspects of a property:

= The Development Footprint =

This is the area that encompasses all the property you inhabit and recreate on as it extends to the shorefront. This “humanized” area could be entirely lacking in foliage, or there might be a lawn (hopefully well back from the shore). LakeSmart evaluators say, “Less lawn is better!” Lawns do not slow and absorb runoff into the soil as well as most other foliage.

The slope of your property receives strong consideration. The steeper the gradient toward the lake, the more powerful the force of any runoff. Thus, there is a greater need for winding pathways to the lake and for a robust and deep buffer of foliage at the shore to absorb runoff before it reaches the lake.

= Breaks in Your Buffer =

Again, less is better. Minimize routes for runoff to flow to the lake. The buffer is the last line of defense preventing phosphorus-laden runoff from entering the pond. (The nutrient phosphorus is the main cause of algae blooms.)

The layers of a buffer slow the force of raindrops falling from great heights and increase the likelihood of absorption. The layers of an optimal buffer are tall trees, succession trees (not yet tall), shrubs, plants and ground cover or duff (spongy soft absorbing ground).

Not all properties are resplendent in robust buffers. Those laden with hemlock typically have a dense canopy and good spongy duff, with little in between because the hemlocks create a heavily shaded, acidic, and nutrient-poor environment for an understory. However, if all the remaining LakeSmart criteria have been met, evaluators will take what nature has provided and humans enhance to see whether an award can be given.

Hemlocks aside, if you don't have a good shorefront buffer on your property now, we can show you how to plant one, or the Youth Conservation Corps will do it for you (see below). There is some cost for Conservation Corps services but not for ours.



= Potential Erosion from Your Property =

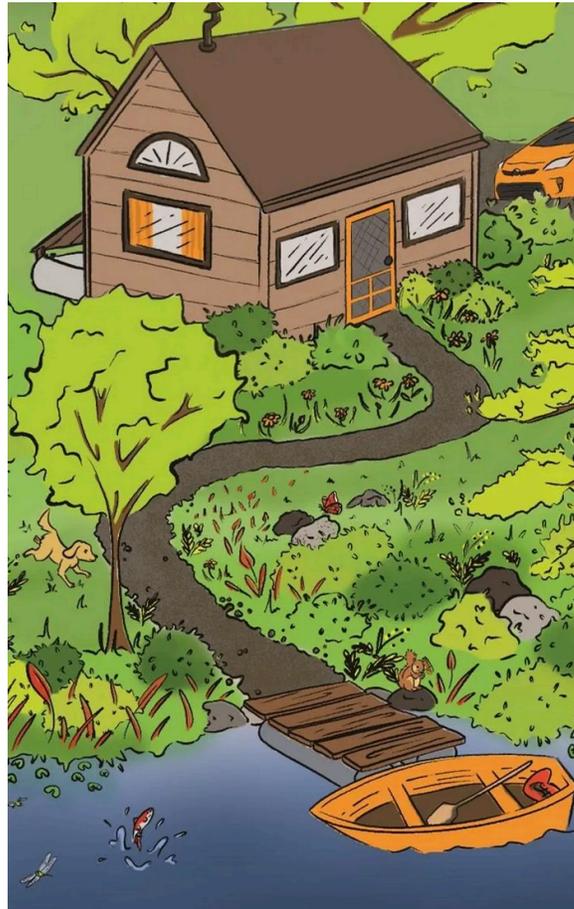
The LakeSmart program encourages having minimal land impact. Consolidate the storage of water toys off the ground. Relocate the fire pit and seating area from the water's edge to further back in the developed area and allow a larger buffer, with more foliage. Utilize a winding pathway through the buffer to the shore. Cover exposed soil with erosion-control mulch (ECM) to prevent soil loss to the lake. Because there is phosphorus in that soil, you are not only conserving your property, you are also helping keep the lake clear.

= Your Lake Access =

Your water access gets significant emphasis in the LakeSmart evaluation, and, once again, less is better. A typical dock width of four feet creates a single break in your shoreline. You could let more of your shoreline go natural and launch your canoe or kayak from your dock. How about a set of steps off your dock, forgoing wading in from the shore?

Lastly, the added benefits of a better buffer and fewer breaks in the shoreline help to decrease lake noise (wake boats, jet skis, loudspeakers). Large, robust buffers filter lake

lights, and they calm winds and waves entering your “private peace/piece of Heaven.”
Really, what’s not to like?



Living lightly on the land for the sake of the lakes helps assure your private peace/piece of Heaven.

= Finally =

Volunteer LakeSmart evaluators want to help you manage your lakefront property to protect your real estate *and* our beloved McGrath Pond and Salmon Lake!

Kim & Dave Hallee from MPSLA LakeSmart are at your service for a free evaluation. Call 207-314-0881 or email khalleern@gmail.com

Are you interested in becoming a LakeSmart evaluator yourself? Speak with them about it.

The Youth Conservation Corps of 7 Lakes Alliance is available for installation of Best Management Practices, or BMPs (winding pathways, ECM, buffer plantings, infiltration steps, and other improvements). Contact Stuart Cole, Erosion Control Project Manager, (207) 323-1900 or stuart.cole@7lakesalliance.org

STOPPING THE SPREAD: DEFENDING MAINE'S LAKES FROM AQUATIC INVADERS



JOSIE MILLER
Invasive Aquatics Coordinator
7 Lakes Alliance

The first record of an invasive aquatic plant in Maine was variable-leaf milfoil in Sebago Lake in 1970. Since then, eight invasive aquatic plant species—including variable-leaf milfoil and curly-leaf pondweed—have spread to 38 Maine waterways.

Variable-leaf milfoil was introduced to the Belgrade Lakes watershed in the early 1990s in Belgrade Stream, which connects lower Long Pond to Messalonskee Lake. To address this important issue, 7 Lakes Alliance, the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, and Friends of Messalonskee have recently partnered to expand and intensify remediation efforts—work that will continue over the next several years. Already this work is showing success. Since the increased effort began in June 2025, the number of milfoil fragments leaving boats from the Oakland boat launch on Messalonskee Lake has dropped substantially.

These invasive plants harm native species, reduce water quality, hinder recreation, and lower property values. Thick milfoil mats make swimming, fishing, and boating difficult—and they are costly to manage. In dense infestations such as Belgrade Stream, herbicide applications are often the only viable control method as hand removal is not sustainable for large infestations.



Variable-leaf milfoil in Belgrade Stream.



Camp Golden Pond campers learn how to identify aquatic plants.



1-inch of milfoil with a whorl is all it takes to start a new infestation.

The primary pathway of spread is plant fragments hitchhiking on boats and gear. To combat this, Maine launched the Courtesy Boat Inspection (CBI) Program in 2001. The numbers of inspections statewide have grown from 2,848 in 2001 to 91,612 in 2024. 7 Lakes Alliance manages the CBI program at all motorized boat launches in the watershed from May to October; in 2025, a team of about 50 inspectors checked 14,680 boats. Over the last five years, CBIs in the Belgrade Lakes watershed have prevented 64 potential infestations, including 61 fragments intercepted from boats leaving Messalonskee Lake alone.

Because CBIs cannot inspect every boat, education is essential. Inspectors teach boaters how to check their own gear, and 7 Lakes Alliance hosts workshops to train volunteers to identify invasive plants and survey for new threats through the Adopt-a-Shoreline program. As invasive species continue to spread in Maine, prevention and education remain our strongest tools for protecting the Belgrade Lakes watershed. 💧

Can you volunteer at our boat launch with MPSLA next summer?

Email robert.merrill148@gmail.com

MPSLA 2025 BUSINESS SPONSORS

Please show our appreciation by giving these folks our patronage.

Watershed Futurists: (\$1000+)

Wheeler's Camps www.wheelers-camps.com

Lake Futurists: (\$500-\$999)

Golden Pond Wealth Management (207) 873-2200

Lake Stewards: (\$100-\$249)

Auburn Professional Counseling (334) 728-7911

Boy Locksmith (207) 872-5862

Business Integra Services (207) 314-6341

Day's Store www.go2days.com

Dockside Physical Therapy (207) 660-2546

Hamlin's Marine www.hamlinsmarina.com

Daniel McCarron, Lakepoint Realty (207) 838-2603

New England Naturopathic Health (207) 873-9380

Novem Inc. <https://novem.technology>

Paddle Inn on McGrath Pond RonNona@Roadrunner.com

Somerset Stone & Stove www.somersetstonecenter.com

The Thirsty Mule www.facebook.com/thethirstymule

Woodrest Cottages www.woodrest.com

MPSLA received donations of \$3,750 from the Town of Belgrade
and \$3,750 from the Town of Oakland during 2025.

A Big "Thank You!" to those Towns and their Taxpayers.

2025 MPSLA MEMBERS

Watershed Futurists

(\$1,000+)

Mal & Ellen Dawson
Lenny Reich & Barbara Allen

Lake Futurists (\$500-\$999)

Amy Bernatchez
Bill & Arlene Brandeis
Neil Korostoff & Stacy Levy
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Watershed Stewards (\$250-\$499)

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Jeff Rosato
Scott & Sue Rosenberger Family
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Phil & Christie Souza
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Kent Vanheukelom & Sandra
Korman
Rebecca Wlazlo

Lake Members

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Anonymous (x4)
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Marilyn Wheeler
Don & Diane Wood
Rob & Charlene Zabrowski
Dick & Maggie Zieg

McGrath Pond - Salmon Lake Association

= Membership is by Calendar Year =

During December, payment received from 2025 members will be put toward your 2026 membership. That's a great way to be sure you'll be listed in our printed Spring/Summer 2026 issue!

Your Membership and Contributions Fund:

**Invasive Plant Patrols
Courtesy Boat Inspections
The Youth Conservation Corps
Water Quality Work of All Kinds
Education and Outreach Programs
Matching Funds for Federal Grants
LakeSmart Evaluations and Programs
Maintenance of the Narrows Preserve**

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

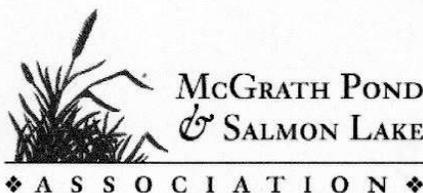
**Individual — \$35
Family — \$50
Lake Steward — \$100
Watershed Steward — \$250
Lake Futurist — \$500
Watershed Futurist — \$1,000+**

To join or renew, PLEASE SEE THE LINKS BELOW.

MPSLA is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.

Our Mission is to protect the natural character, enhance the water quality,
and promote the responsible use of the lakes for the benefit of ALL.

MPSLA
PO Box 576
Oakland, ME 04963
www.mcgrathpond-salmonlake.org



Annual Membership Form

For year 20_____ Name (s) _____
Preferred Mailing Address _____
Lake Address (if applicable) _____
Email _____ Phone _____

- I would like a paper copy of the newsletter (available on MPSLA's website by default).
- I wish to be listed as "anonymous" in the newsletter.

**Membership starts at \$35 for individuals
and \$50 for families.**

Business sponsorship starts at \$100.
Business Sponsors are featured on our
website, in our newsletter, and at the
annual meeting.

Please indicate your contribution level:

- \$35 Individual
- \$50 Family
- \$100 Lake Steward
- \$250 Watershed Steward
- \$500 Lake Futurist
- \$1000+ Watershed Futurist

Additional contribution:

- Project Funding (water quality, etc.) \$_____
- Courtesy Boat Inspection Program \$_____
- Frances Fox Sandmel Environmental Education Fund \$ _____
- Gift Membership \$_____ For _____

Total enclosed: _____ + _____ = \$ _____
Membership Additional TOTAL

✓ **Make checks payable to "MPSLA" and mail to: MPSLA, PO Box 576, Oakland, ME 04963**

Please contact me about:

- Serving on the MPSLA Board of Directors (out-of-state residents welcome!)
- Becoming a Volunteer Courtesy Boat Inspector
- Getting my property evaluated for LakeSmart certification

THANK YOU!

MPSLA is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.