

THE ISLAND TRAIL

NEWSLETTER OF THE MAINE ISLAND TRAIL ASSOCIATION | SUMMER 2023



MITA STAFF

Regional Stewardship Manager Maria Jenness at the helm of the Crushtacean during a field test in early May.

PRESENTING: THE CRUSHTACEAN!

By Brian Marcaurelle, Program Director

YOU CAN OPERATE IT WITH ONE HAND, maybe even just a few fingers. Your arm effortlessly controls a lever that engages a hydraulic cylinder attached to a large, flat plate. Push the lever forward and the plate begins to glide with smooth and steady force toward a second plate, fixed in place. As the plates come together, whatever lies between gets slowly and gratifyingly squashed into a flattened version of its former self.

If you can extend your arm, then you can run MITA's slick, new

stewardship tool. The machine was built for a single purpose: to compact derelict lobster traps into a more manageable size. It passed its initial field test in early May with flying colors, answering several important questions in the process:

- Is it sufficiently durable and effective? Check.
- Is it sufficiently light and maneuverable? Check.
- Can it be transported to islands via MITA skiff? Check.
- Do you feel like a superhero when you use it? Heck yeah.

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Thank you to Stu and Juli Haddon for serving as volunteer editors for The Island Trail.

The Maine Island Trail is a 375-mile long waterway extending from the New Hampshire border to the Canadian Maritimes. Along the route, public and private islands are available to members or the public for overnight stopovers where they can picnic or camp in a wilderness setting.

The Maine Island Trail Association (MITA) is a nonprofit organization whose goal is to advance a model of thoughtful use and volunteer stewardship of Maine's wild islands, creating an inspiring recreational water trail that is cared for by the people who use it.

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WELCOME



ONE BAY AT A TIME

By Doug Welch, Executive Director

SECOND ONLY TO “WHAT’S YOUR FAVORITE ISLAND?” the most common question I am asked in casual cocktail-type settings is whether I have “done“ the Maine Island Trail. It’s an oddly loaded question. I suspect it is based on a deep-seated American affinity with linear trails like the Appalachian Trail that almost everyone knows starts in Georgia and ends in Maine. People often admire a challenging start-to-end route and perhaps even look down upon those who would dabble in anything less. That could make sense for the Appalachian or Pacific Crest Trail. The Oregon Trail and others of that ilk were about point-to-point transportation and conquest, not recreation. While a contemporary hiker might choose an alternative route on a particular day, the underlying assumption is that if you are spending more than a night or two you must be traveling in a specific direction with a destination in mind. That is the challenge. That is the point.

But the Maine Island Trail is different. As we sometimes say, it is a “choose-your-own-adventure” experience. One is not constrained by a specific beginning or end, let alone frowned upon for focusing on one particular area and not another. Indeed, that’s what we at MITA tend to recommend. While I once traveled the trail from Portland to Cutler and back in a 17-foot Boston Whaler, and another time from Kittery to Lubec in a SAFE Boat Defender, my adventure of choice is to take it easy and explore the Trail one bay at a time.

The regions of the coast of Maine are remarkably distinct. Casco Bay could never be mistaken for Cobscook Bay. Same for Deer Isle versus Downeast. Each region is different, from geology to tides to prevailing weather. You could easily spend several days exploring each of the major bays. You could explore one or two of them over the course of a summer or, indeed, a lifetime.

Of course, a major factor in your approach to the Trail is the boat that carries you. My brother and I had an amazing trip from Pen Bay to MDI in a chartered Duffy years ago. The ability to power from island A to B, drop anchor, and explore the uplands at your leisure is an incredible luxury. As documented in a video several years ago, I took another trip by wherry in which I rowed within various protected bays while car-topping the boat around the headlands. As a sole rower in a boat with a low freeboard, I never would have considered navigating more exposed seas but, enabled by a simple roof rack, I could explore several different regions in a single two-week adventure.

We do have a handful of people who travel the entire trail each summer. More power to them! In 2020 a MITA member paddled from New Castle, New Hampshire to the Canadian border in an extraordinary four days, four hours, and 17 minutes. For those who love a new challenge, I’ve never heard anyone claim to have traversed the entire Trail and landed on every island by any sort of watercraft. Personally, I’m less drawn to the challenge of “doing” the Trail. I would prefer a more leisurely pace with more intentional regard for the individual islands and their distinct character. Make a modest plan, allow flexibility for weather, and enjoy the ride—one bay at a time.



MITA STAFF

The Trail is well suited for any pace!

Crushing Traps, Lifting Spirits

Cleaning island shorelines is in MITA's DNA, but removing derelict fishing gear is tricky business. For starters, there are regulations that protect fishing gear, which is the personal property of fishermen. The rules do not distinguish between intact gear that is being stored or fished, and mangled gear that is lost or abandoned and no longer fishable. Thankfully, the Department of Marine Resources understands the difference, and allows organizations like MITA to work within certain protocols to identify and remove derelict fishing gear from Maine's waters and shoreline.

Regulatory hurdles aside, the act of physically removing derelict gear poses other challenges. Lobster traps, which are large and heavy when fully intact, become unwieldy and potentially unsafe when battered and tossed onto island shores. In MITA's experience, traps that have broken free from their lines and been flung onto islands are almost always damaged beyond the point of reuse. Fishermen have confirmed as much time and again. In the rare instance when a nearly pristine trap is found on an island cleanup, it can be set aside and returned to the mainland for fishermen to retrieve. Ditto for salvageable buoys. But the vast majority of derelict gear found on MITA's cleanups is simply junk and must be hauled to the waterline, heaved into the skiffs, and carted back to dumpsters waiting on shore. Fitting as many lobster traps as possible into a small skiff is an art form. It requires you to play an unfriendly game of three-dimensional Tetris where all of the objects are different shapes and they occasionally harm you. While difficult work, MITA's boat captains seem to revel in the challenge, which has produced lasting images of skippers straining to peer over a mountain of tangled wire while motoring back to shore.

Large accumulations of derelict gear typically involve mangled traps that are partially buried, filled with rocks, entangled

in vegetation, or stubbornly linked together with other traps. For years we've fantasized about ways to make gear cleanups easier, but given the way traps amass on shore, manual removal remains the most practical, low-impact way of going about it. Even though the extraction may be painstaking, with our new trap compactor we believe we've found a way to make the handling and transport simpler and safer.

We Ain't Afraid of no Ghost Gear

Volunteer monitor skipper Henri Gignoux may have been the first to suggest a trap compacting device for MITA. In 2015, he shared a concept drawing for a towable, land-based trap crusher that would flatten traps on shore so they could be loaded into dumpsters more efficiently for recycling. MITA's staff loved the idea, but were daunted by the expense, engineering, maintenance, and storage challenges. Without fail, during each subsequent gear cleanup we'd pause and think, "Henri's trap crusher would come in really handy right now."

Then in 2019 we became aware of the work of Maine-based OceansWide and its Traps2Treasure program. OceansWide dives for ghost gear along the coast (fishing gear that is lost but continues to fish underwater) and also collects "retired" traps from the yards of fishermen for recycling. As part of its trap processing operation in Gouldsboro, OceansWide

utilizes modified log splitters to flatten the traps. Their machines rekindled our interest in a trap compactor and inspired us to try to take the concept further by engineering a portable device capable of crushing traps where we found them, on the islands.

We circled back to Henri for design suggestions, and engaged other volunteers and engineering professionals as well. After several rounds of creative thinking and drafting, we settled on a design for a lightweight device that achieved our power and mobility goals. This winter, Durham-based Cumberland Iron Works took our plans, further refined them, and fabricated a custom machine that met our unique needs and specifications. Simply put, it's awesome.

So much so that it deserved an awesome name, so we tried on a few. Trap Compactor and Trap Crusher were obvious starting points, but they seemed a bit too literal. Sir Smooshalot and Smashy McSmashface made us giggle, but were a bit too silly. Then at the May monitor skipper meeting, volunteer Kelsey Sullivan casually suggested a brilliant name that instantly won us over: the Crushtacean. Chef's kiss.

Unlike the heavy-duty machines developed for use on the mainland, the Crushtacean is comparatively light and portable while still delivering serious power.

It is made of aluminum, (CONT. PAGE 9)



The Crushtacean takes to the sea for the first time aboard one of MITA's iconic red work boats.



MITA STAFF

Monitor skippers Ben Fuller and Ted Scharf apply some teamwork to a stubborn filter during boat decommissioning in November of 2022.

Has Anyone Seen the Spark Plug Wrench?

By Stu Haddon, Editor

Although this account is presented as if all the events happened in one day, it is in fact describing activities which took place at different times. In addition, some of the conversations may have been altered (though not in substance) for dramatic effect. The facts presented here are, however, indisputable!

THE EARLY NOVEMBER SUN brought some welcome warmth to the task. I held the oil pan up to the drain chute on the outboard and unscrewed the drain plug. Warm oil rushed out into the pan, apparently glad to escape after a season of intensive lubricating and no doubt congratulating itself on a job well done. Once the flow had reduced to a trickle, I took stock of the scene around me. The yard of the MITA Boat Shop looked like a convention of Lund skiffs, and there was

a lot going on. Here, a skiff being pressure washed; there, another with its motor running, cooling water gushing onto the gravel. Everywhere, people intent on tasks. The annual winterization of the fleet was well under way.

To support this undertaking, there were three stewardship managers, a bunch of monitor skippers, and the MITA cargo trailer packed to the gunnels with tools, parts, and miscellaneous items galore. Add in a comprehensive maintenance and

repair task list and you have the makings of a day of hard work, hilarity and problem solving, as well as some good old breeze shooting.

The oil finished draining and I turned my attention to the filter, which is mounted on the side of the engine. Any DIY mechanics reading this will be aware that not everything on an outboard (and sometimes almost nothing) is designed with easy maintenance in mind. In this case, the oil filter was at least accessible. You do, however, have to hope that whoever put it on the previous season didn't belong to the "tighter the better" school of thought. If it is so tight that the filter wrench starts to slip, there are still some options for removal, but none of

them are very pretty. On this occasion, it came loose without any problem. However, a design feature does mean that, as you unscrew the filter, it immediately discharges the oil contained therein. There may be a cunning trick for avoiding the inevitable rush of black stuff—and its almost immediate appearance out of the many mysterious holes in the engine casing—but the best I've ever managed involves the use of countless paper towels and three hands.

With a new filter attached and fresh oil added, I turned my attention to the spark plugs and searched for the appropriate wrench, last seen sitting within arm's reach. Not there. Then I remembered that someone had asked to borrow it.

"Has anyone seen the spark plug wrench?" echoed across the yard.

"Mike had it," someone said.

"I saw it a minute ago in *Skimmer*," said another.

A search ensued, and the wrench was found, mysteriously perched on a trailer fender.

"Huh. How did it get there?" It was a good question. Personally, I think it may have had to do with quantum activity, wormholes and alternative universes, but that's only a hypothesis.

At this point, we took a break for lunch, seated in a circle in the sun and perched on the parlous folding chairs that came with the Boat Shop. My memory of the conversation blurs into a mash-up of many similar occasions. It possibly started with appreciative comments about the new Boat Shop and how it would make life so much easier for everyone, and moved on to thoughts about the morning's work including, no doubt, some problem solving (buy more spark plug wrenches?) and sharing of ideas (buy more spark plug wrenches?). After that, it could have gone anywhere. A lively recounting of tales from the Trail perhaps, or some summer experiences with family and friends, or even events in the country at large and the world beyond. Whatever the topics, this is always a congenial time, similar to those "round the campfire" moments that so often create strong memories, even if

you can't recall exactly what was said. It's the shared experience of talking to good friends that creates the memory.

After lunch, I teamed up with fellow monitor skipper Bob MacEwen to check the trailer electrics. A life outdoors for six months of the year, including frequent proximity to salt water, can play havoc with wiring and components so we braced ourselves for some repair and replacement fun.

Fortunately for us, MITA has a nifty device for testing trailer lights. This consists of a small 12-volt battery connected to a switch which allows the lucky operator (who has thus been relieved of the hassle of having to hook up the trailer to a vehicle) to cycle through sidelights/brake lights/turn indicators while their teammate stands at the rear of the trailer and relays results.

The first three trailers passed with flying colors, lighting up and flashing to order in fine style. Number four, however, brought our testing momentum to a grinding halt. Everything worked on the left light cluster, but nothing on the right.

"Well, damn," we said in unison.

We were in the middle of our diagnosis, which included removing, cleaning and replacing connectors and checking ground

wires when Tom Carr wandered up.

"Not sure if you were aware," he said, "that this tester needs to be fully charged, otherwise it can give spurious results." Bob and I looked at one another.

"Well, damn," we said.

We went off to find the battery pack used for jump starts. This gave us more confidence, but not a different result, and in the end we replaced the light cluster.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the yard, other tasks on the list were being ticked off. People had been wrestling with seized wheel nuts, lubricating trailer parts, replacing anything broken or damaged, and thoroughly checking each skiff's impressive inventory of safety equipment, tools and spare parts. There would still be more to do on another day, before the skiffs could be tucked up for the winter. Then, in the spring, yet more to do to ready them for the season ahead.

Spark plug wrench availability notwithstanding, the maintenance of our fleet of boats is, as I hope you can see, carried out in the finest traditions of MITA, where staff and volunteers work together as a team and get the job done. This is as it should be, especially when it comes to maintaining the unsung heroes of the organization.



MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS BENEFITS!

Go to mita.org/benefits to discover dozens of discounts on gear, services, and experiences that are available to you as a MITA member!

Eco-artist **Mariah Reading** has made a name for herself turning refuse into beauty. This past spring, her show **WASTE WATER** brought MITA stewardship into focus.

TRASH

By Nick Parson, Communications Manager

TRANSFORMED



MARIAH READING

"Snowy Saw Blade", painted on a rusty blade that was recovered by MITA volunteers on an island cleanup. Mariah often photographs her pieces superimposed on the actual scene that she used for the painting, creating a striking alignment.

Venturing out onto the Maine Island Trail is an uplifting experience. Maine's coastal environment serves up expansive palettes of blues, greens, and a myriad of other colors and shades that combine to create some of the most dramatic seascapes in the world. However, while traveling along Maine's stunning coast, you will inevitably encounter less-than-ideal sights, especially the presence of human-generated debris and pollution.

The work of Maine-based eco-artist Mariah Reading brings into focus the relationship between glorious natural spaces and the not-so-natural pieces of trash that are unfortunately littered across them. This past spring, Mariah partnered with MITA to produce a collaborative gallery show entitled WASTE WATER, which was hosted by Casco Bay Artisans on The Maine Wharf in Portland. The show centered on pieces of marine debris collected by MITA volunteers during the 2022 stewardship season that were then used by Mariah as media for landscape paintings. A portion of the proceeds from the show went to benefit MITA's programming.

Using a piece of trash as a canvas is just one element of the story that Mariah tells with her work. Once she has completed her painting, she returns to the landscape

that she painted with the finished piece in hand and then photographs it aligned with its surroundings. The effect is as provocative as it is captivating. At first glance, it may appear to the viewer that the piece of trash has disappeared into the landscape. An instant later, it becomes clear that what at first seems to be a straightforward landscape photo incorporates a superbly painted piece of trash.

In 2022, MITA volunteers spent over 7,700 hours working on the Trail. The majority of that time was spent doing what we at MITA do best: picking up trash. Even on the outermost islands of the Maine Island Trail, litter is a constant presence. Mariah's work reminds us that even among the beautiful spaces that we call home on the coast of Maine, our waste is right there at the surface, staring back at us. As Mariah explained:

"Everything leads to the sea. Especially with the effects of climate change that we're seeing now, with higher levels of erosion, rising temperatures, and higher sea levels, it's remarkable what you can find out there. I like to think about the story of these items—where did they depart from, and why did they end up here? It's overwhelming to think about all of the things that need to happen for the world to not just collapse in on itself, so I



MARIAH READING

"No Drone Zone"

hope my work can provide these bite-sized opportunities for reflection and a chance for people to consider their own impacts."

Of course, her work is not solely aimed at highlighting the plague of trash in natural spaces. Her choice of materials with which to create her pieces is also a part of her own personal effort to reduce waste in her artistic process. Having begun as a traditional landscape painter and sculptor, Mariah took note of just how much waste was involved in the process of creating art. From single-use molds to disassembled and discarded installations, the trash was piling up as

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MITA STAFF

Mariah beside some of her work for WASTE WATER at Casco Bay Artisans in Portland.

"Everything leads to the sea. Especially with the effects of climate change that we're seeing now, with higher levels of erosion, rising temperatures, and higher sea levels, it's remarkable what you can find out there."



MITA STAFF

Attendees viewing WASTE WATER during the March 30 opening reception.



Mariah addressing the crowd at New England Ocean Cluster.

she created.

“I noticed there was a parallel between creating landscapes and feeding landfills, so I wanted to change that for myself. Since then, I’ve simply tried to find ways to recycle detritus into landscape paintings. I’m not a perfect environmentalist but, as I remove trash from these spaces, I feel like I’m working towards being a better steward of this land that is so easy to take for granted. And I hope that others can move in that direction too, in their own ways.”

It’s easy to see how Mariah’s work could inspire us at MITA and create a desire for collaboration. As an organization, we also work at the intersection of trash and treasure. We are a recreational nonprofit that exists to maintain and steward a water trail for the sake of enjoyment, and perhaps the most critical aspect of that work is keeping the Trail healthy and as free of debris as we can. Our community of volunteers cares for the islands because

they love them, so we really believed that this series of paintings would resonate.

And resonate it did, as the March 30th opening for the show drew well over 150 people to Portland’s waterfront for a dual-venue reception at Casco Bay Artisans and New England Ocean Cluster. It was a moving celebration of Mariah’s work, MITA’s mission, and how both intersected. While there were many long-time MITA members and volunteers in attendance, there was an even greater number of attendees who were getting their first glimpse at what MITA is all about through the lens of our collaboration with Mariah.

The show concluded on April 16th, but the message lives on. There is so much that we can do to better protect our natural spaces, on the grand scale as well as in our own small ways. While we cherish and enjoy the Maine coast day in and day out, it’s on all of us to take a closer look and recognize the challenges of marine debris that are right there before our eyes, even if we don’t notice them at first glance.



MITA STAFF



MARIAH READING

Muddy boot found by MITA volunteers (left) and after Mariah finished her piece, “Marshy Muck Boot,” creating an alignment within a landscape (right).

so it won't rust in the saltwater environment, and it is light enough for two people to lift and carry. Several components detach and can be easily reassembled, which aids in transport and maneuverability. The power pack is compact and relatively quiet yet provides more than enough muscle to compress even the sturdiest lobster traps. We're grateful to Cumberland Iron Works for their engineering insight and craftsmanship, and to the generous MITA members who donated in support of our Flat Traps Fund, which covered the cost of materials and labor to fabricate this innovative stewardship tool.

Getting From Derelict to Problem Licked

There are many islands on the coast with large accumulations of traps, including islands on and off the Maine Island Trail. We plan to utilize the Crushtacean on several cleanups in 2023 to flatten traps on site after they have been collected. The resulting trap "pancakes" will be easier and safer to handle and will enable larger and neater stacks in our boats and in the dumpsters, increasing the efficiency of transporting and recycling them. After a full season of use we will consider whether or not to tinker with the design before commissioning a companion device in 2024.

Derelict fishing gear is an unfortunate and sadly unavoidable byproduct of Maine's fishing economy. While some steps can be taken to reduce preventable gear loss, there will always be unintentional gear loss and damage from storms, currents and other natural sources, as well as strikes by other boaters. Minimizing the potential for derelict fishing gear before it occurs is a key part of the equation. Safely and effectively managing derelict fishing gear after it occurs is equally important. Thanks to the Crushtacean, MITA is now in a better position to deal with the gear that makes its way to island shores.



Splash! was held in the exceptionally "boaty" confines of East Coast Yacht Sales in Yarmouth.

Splash! 2023

By Pam Erickson, Advancement Director

Mid May arrived, and we were Splashed!

After being in hiatus since 2019 due to COVID-19, Splash!, MITA's annual signature fundraising event to celebrate the beginning of the boating season, joyously returned this spring.

This year, it was held at East Coast Yacht Sales in Yarmouth, with the rising tide on our side. The season's awaited lengthening of the day was finally evident, as long-time members and newcomers alike gathered under the apropos theme of "Red Sky at Night."

Colorful spinnakers dropped from the ceiling and, amid the boats not yet launched for the season, the festivities included a vibrant silent auction with adventure-themed items filling the room. Widely grinning MITA folks departed with a stand up paddleboard (SUP); road bike; overnights on boats and in cabins along the coast; restaurant delights; and some of the most beautiful art Maine has to offer.

Beyond that, there wasn't anything silent about it. The sushi circulated, the beverages refreshed, and the live music wove its way through cheerful reconnections. This melded perfectly with the exuberant conversations over

MITA's newly-fabricated trap compactor aptly named the Crushtacean which was designed for the safe and efficient crushing of traps to facilitate their swift removal from islands and on display.

What stood out the most that night, however, was the passionate, dedicated community of Maine Island Trail supporters. That support comes in many forms: a new membership; the donation of an auction item or sponsorship by a local business; the playful participation in a raffle; sharing stories of favorite sites along the Trail; and which island stewardship events people are signed up to enjoy this season. It comes in those who are Granite Society members (connected to MITA for 20 or more years), Launch Committee members, app users, first-time volunteers, island adopters, monitor skippers, donors, island owners, trustees, and friends. The Splash! celebration undoubtedly supports the steady, impactful work made possible by many hands from Kittery to Cobscook Bay, but more than that, it connects us as a community. Whether you attended the event or were there in spirit, we acknowledge how important it is to pause and raise a glass to our shared passion for stewardship of this stunning coastline, to continuing to ensure access for all and our role in it.

That rising tide? Yup, it surely does lift all boats. Especially if it's a red, 18-foot Lund.

2022: The Financial Year in Review

The narrative of MITA's financial year for 2022 is probably best characterized as a year of sharp increases alongside equally steep declines.

With the purchase of the Boat Shop at 36 Prout Road in Freeport, MITA became a property owner for the first time in its history. This was a landmark achievement for our Stewardship program, but also had a significant impact on MITA's financial picture.

The property purchase drove most of a 370% increase in Capital Assets, while the increase to Total Assets was muted by a decline in Other Assets due to the decline in value of MITA's investment account. MITA's purchase of the Boat Shop came with another first. MITA took on a mortgage (at what now seems pretty favorable terms), recorded under Long-Term Liabilities.

Individual Contributions soared, with most of the increase coming as donations over and above annual membership dues. Events income grew, and though the line remains a relatively small portion of MITA's income, the opportunity to have regional outdoor summer gatherings was a welcome change from the prior years of social distancing. Other income dropped sharply as the prior year's Paycheck Protection Program funds were a one-time item.

Despite annual expenses being up over the prior year, the various larger increases on the income lines led to a very comfortable Net Revenue figure for 2022, something that will cushion the organization as we move into fiscal year 2023.

Audited financial statements are available online at the bottom of the mita.org homepage.

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

ASSETS	FY 22	FY21
Current Assets	\$233,602	\$219,254
Capital Assets (Property & Equipment)	\$673,313	\$182,411
Other Assets (Incl. Restricted Investments)	\$1,611,283	\$1,858,463
Total Assets	\$2,518,198	\$2,260,128
LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS		
Current Liabilities	\$47,595	\$33,820
Long-Term Liabilities	\$330,834	\$0
Net Assets	\$2,139,769	\$2,226,308
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$2,518,198	\$2,260,128

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

SUPPORT & REVENUE	FY 22	FY 21
Membership Dues & Individual Contributions	\$1,117,882	\$809,063
Grants, Sponsorships & Contracts	\$232,642	\$200,232
Events	\$32,960	\$22,172
Other	\$34,247	\$143,432
Total Operating Revenues & Other Support	\$1,417,731	\$1,174,899
EXPENSES		
Program Services	\$907,739	\$770,019
Fund Development	\$197,336	\$162,520
Administration	\$121,441	\$107,438
Total Operating Expenses	\$1,226,516	\$1,039,977
NET OPERATING REVENUES OVER (UNDER) EXPENSES	\$191,215	\$134,922
Gain (Loss) on Sale & Disposal of Assets incl. Donated Boat Sales	\$4,097	\$32,530
Gain (Loss) on Unrestricted Investment	(\$6,215)	\$5,308
Gain (Loss) on Restricted Investment	(\$275,636)	\$234,268
INCREASE (DECREASE) IN NET ASSETS	(\$86,539)	\$407,028

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The Dunham Group

Fore Points Marina
Freedom Boat Club
Front Street Shipyard
Gideon Asen
Green Clean Maine
Hodgdon Yacht Services
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Sea-Junk Puppets, Large Buoys, and a Big Net

By Charles Kniffen, Island Adopter

I HAVE LIVED ALL OVER THE COAST OF MAINE, finally landing in Lubec where I have resided for over 10 years. For nearly thirty years I have been a solo all-season kayaker, and all the while have collected sea-junk and ghost gear from the ledges, islands, and rocky shores of Maine. Last year I started stewarding Rodgers Island for MITA.

While working with children at the Addison Point Children's Program, I began making sea-junk puppets with the kids, and they put on several very successful puppet plays. I have continued to create puppets and assemblages which have been in many fundraisers and events, including Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) Common Ground Fair. These puppets demonstrate how we can clean up the ocean and have a ton of creative fun in the process. This year, a dozen of my puppets will be on display in Eastport, starting at the Port Authority and stretching along the seawall and breakwater to the Tides Institute, ending at the Peavey Library. Following the Eastport Salmon Festival, they will be at the Landmarks Art Gallery in Lubec.

I first encountered a MITA crew as I was paddling back into Bailey's Mistake and we hove to for a chat. I launched into a full-length harangue about large plastic buoys, having just found one that had shed its full load of pellets into the sea and filled with water so that I could not move it. They commiserated and informed me that they were scouting the Bold Coast in an effort to extend the MITA trail system into the far Downeast waters.

Some years later, MITA was in the area and Deb Seavey introduced me to Christina Hassett, regional stewardship manager, who recruited me as a volunteer steward for Rodgers Island in Johnson Bay. This is a very quiet island which I enjoy immensely, and it is relatively easy to keep clean due to configuration and ocean current patterns in the area.

However, shortly after I became the island adopter, I discovered that an immense heap of thousands of pounds of trawling (or containment) netting had come ashore on the southeast tip of the island.

MITA had worked very hard in the past, sectioning another big net and hauling it all out by hand. I got a few pieces of that off the beach myself. The recent net was becoming entrenched in the beach, tangled with seaweed, and promised to be a very difficult project. I sent out a community query asking if someone with a big trawler would help remove it. Danny Fitzsimmons, a local fisherman, said he would but he had

just pulled his boat out for repairs. Then a worker at Cooke's Aquaculture put me in contact with Chuck Brown, the manager of their Eastport branch. He offered a barge with a crane and two crewmen to haul it out. I trailered the net back from Eastport and stored it in the old Peacock Factory, parting out pieces for my sea junk artwork. They also retrieved at least three large buoys that I had reported washed ashore on Huckins Beach, about three miles from Rodgers Island.

Thanks to Cooke's Aquaculture for being such good neighbors.

Shortly after that I joined Christina on the island where she was leading an end-of-season beach cleanup. A good visit as well as a productive time were had by all.

Later, at the site of the old foundation on the island, I found a dug well that had once taken the life of a deer that had become trapped within. My hope is that we can create a step well so wildlife can still get to the water but have an easy escape route should an animal fall in. So many things to do.

The Maine islands are a remarkable treasure, and helping to keep them as pristine as possible is both an honor and a joy.

Charles Kniffen is a combat-wounded veteran of the Vietnam/American war, and has authored two books which relate war and life experiences in conjunction with the benefits of outdoor activity as a method of therapeutic respite and healing: *Fifty Years in a Foxhole* and *Rude Awakenings*.



GET YOUR FEET WET!

Learn how to take your first trip on the Maine Island Trail

Visit mita.org/get-started to explore all the resources available to help you get to a wild Maine island!



MITA's membership manager, Kalyn Bickerman-Martens, has always had a bond with the water.

From the Lakes to the Ocean: the Journey of a Conservation Biologist

By Kalyn Bickerman-Martens, Membership Manager

Growing up in the Lakes Region of Maine, I was constantly surrounded by water. Whether it was catching bullfrogs among the cattails in Torsey Pond or completing the dreaded “tippy test” in a beat-up Old Town Discovery on Maranacook Lake, I spent every single Maine summer day in my swimsuit.

Due to having one parent raised in the concrete jungle of NYC and the other hailing from the potato fields of Aroostook County, it wasn't until I left for Bowdoin College that I got my first taste of Maine coastal life and recreation as I pursued my degree in biology. During the summers I returned to my Lakes Region roots and eventually became certified in canoe instruction for a position at one of the many sleep-away camps Maine has to offer to city-dwelling kids.

Post graduation, I found myself at the New England Aquarium—stationed across from the penguins—wearing turquoise scrubs and enjoying a veterinary internship. The most vivid memory I have was hoisting the belly of the Aquarium's

anaconda for an ultrasound during one of her pregnancies. Surprisingly, anacondas don't lay eggs; they give live birth and the babies are as adorable as (some of) you might imagine.

During my tenure in Boston, I spent several months living on Maui working at a bird sanctuary as an intern with the San Diego Zoo. Upon my return to New England, I reconnected with my love of paddling at Charles River Canoe and Kayak where I helped to lead moonlight paddles on the Charles River, various lessons for kids, and even kayak adventures at Revere Beach.

After a two-year stint in New York for my master's in Conservation Biology, I finally came home to Maine and settled

in the Brunswick area. My then boyfriend, now husband, became the executive director of the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association and we were ecstatic to be back on the shores of the Atlantic.

Several years passed by as I worked on another graduate degree, spending my days in the wild blueberry fields of Downeast Maine catching bumble bees. While in my “entomology era,” I helped to coordinate the Maine Bumble Bee Atlas with the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife—a five-year citizen science project to gather data on Maine's native bumble bee species to better inform policy decisions.

Eventually we had two little boys who, along with the pandemic, changed life dramatically for our family. I began to look closer to home and stumbled upon a listing for a part-time membership associate at the Maine Island Trail Association. I started my MITA tenure in November of 2021 under the supervision of Membership Manager Molly Geiger. Coming into the position knowing very little about MITA, or even the Trail itself, I was struck by their mission of “thoughtful use and volunteer stewardship of Maine's wild islands.” I had spent so much of my career focusing on environmental conservation based on undoing what other people had done, it was refreshing to come into an organization that highlighted mobilizing users to not only partake (and enjoy while doing so!), but also give back and preserve.

Fast forwarding a couple of years to the present day, I have recently taken over the reins from Molly after she left for West Coast adventures. I've spent the last several months attempting to learn the intricacies of this position at hyperspeed as we barreled toward the boating season. After spending my post-college years bouncing between part-time positions and graduate schools, I'm thrilled to have found a home here at MITA. My professional career has led me on a journey of conservation: from endangered Hawaiian forest birds, to loggerhead sea turtles, to bumble bees, and now the Maine Island Trail.



MITA STAFF

Rising Tide's Maine Island Trail Ale. A portion of the proceeds from each can sold goes towards supporting MITA's programming.

Lifted Up by Rising Tide

By Jordi St. John, Business Engagement Manager

We are living in an era of constant change where innovation and redundancy are a revolving door. While this is certainly true, one thing that has remained consistent over the past decade is MITA's partnership with Rising Tide Brewing Company, creators of our namesake brew.

For a long while, staff had been mulling over the idea of a **Maine Island Trail Ale**, so Doug Welch (MITA executive director) sent a request for proposals to local breweries. The thought was that having a collaboration beer would be a great way to celebrate MITA's 25th anniversary. At that time there were only 20-30 craft brewers in Maine. Of all the responses, Rising Tide was the hands-down winner with their offer of genuine collaboration. They

understood this was to be a commercial product, not a temporary "vanity" beer.

The owners of Rising Tide, Heather and Nathan Sanborn, were already MITA members and sailors who loved cruising the coast of Maine and visiting islands. Theirs was a relatively small business and given the connections between them and MITA, it seemed like a perfect fit.

Rising Tide committed to making just one batch of Maine Island Trail Ale in the summer of 2013, but with the offer to make more if the beer proved popular. It was at a perfect time when the business had taken on more brewing volume capacity, which made them eager to capture additional market share. Part of MITA's promise to Rising Tide was that our beer-drinking members would, at the very least, try the

beer. It turned out that MITA's members (and many other people) really liked the beer. By the end of the summer, five batches had been brewed. By 2017, Rising Tide was brewing more like 35 batches per summer!

Rising Tide delivered a perfect summertime ale, with a bright malt body and bold notes of citrus and pine. It's also worth noting that it is low in alcohol so very conducive to sipping while relaxing on an island (except, of course, for the designated skipper).

The beer started out in a bottle then changed over to a can with the logo based on a photo Nathan took at Hells Half Acre, an island on the Trail.

In 2022, Rising Tide announced that Maine Island Trail Ale would be available year-round and the first winter of sales went well. As it turns out, low alcohol, delicious beers pair well with winter activities too.

What Would We Do Without You?



MITA STAFF

Volunteers are at the core of MITA's work. In what follows, three new volunteers recount their experiences of joining the MITA team. Our thanks to Maria Jenness (regional stewardship manager) for encouraging them to share their thoughts with us.

Susan Cooney, cleanup and workday volunteer:

I was a MITA member about 15 years ago when I was living on a boat in Belfast Harbor, but didn't use the guidebook much and didn't keep up my membership after selling the boat. I was inspired to rejoin during the pandemic in 2020 and attended a number of the Zoom presentations.

In 2021 I saw the email about early access to cleanup signups for new MITA volunteers and was so excited about that

opportunity. I joined the Deer Isle spring cleanup in June, and subsequently signed up for several more work days and one of the member paddles. I had boating skills from my sailing days but had never kayaked. I wouldn't have signed up for a trip by myself so it was great to have that incentive and opportunity to join a special MITA trip.

Joining the cleanups worked well for me in so many ways. If you don't have a boat, it can be really hard to find access to the islands, and I felt that I had lost my

connection to the water. It's such a great program to be able to volunteer and have those island experiences. I'm an artist, so on the MITA trips I was also able to take photos for my work. One surprise benefit was that you could socialize and connect with others in a way that you can't in other settings. On my first trip, I realized I had so many small world connections with my fellow boat-mates. I met a wide range of people during MITA trips, and also enjoyed seeing some of the same people at different events. Volunteering (CONT. PAGE 16)

has been a great way to experience beautiful places (we had stunningly perfect weather on all my trips!) while connecting with others.

Noah Rousseau, apprentice monitor skipper:

I learned about MITA from my mom last spring, so when my outdoor leadership class at Mid-Coast School of Technology (MCST) was discussing a community service project, I suggested a shoreline cleanup with MITA. I enjoy doing things like cleanups, returning beautiful places to their natural state. Our class spent a day working with Maria on Monroe Island, which is when I learned about MITA's monitor skipper program. I have always been interested in boating and

thought it would be a great opportunity to get more skills while also giving back. At MCST I did a two-year small engine program before the outdoor leadership program, so I had Leave No Trace (LNT), boating, and navigation skills. I feel like that combination really set me up to use those skills in the real world. The skipper program is a perfect combination of a leisurely day out on the water, but with a purpose: doing monitoring and shoreline cleanup to make sure the islands can be enjoyed by others.


Katy Githens, cleanup volunteer:

I first heard about MITA through Instagram when I saw a post about an island cleanup. It seemed like a really cool opportunity to become familiar with the coastal islands near where I live and meet people while doing something I

enjoy. Volunteering is an important part of my life. I'm always looking for chances to get on the water doing something fun and useful, while contributing to a better community. The MITA fall cleanup was the most fun volunteer opportunity I've ever done! It felt like I was traveling to a different part of the world, even though it was close to home. I was surprised by the amount of trash. It was way more than I expected, especially the large bulky things we found which filled our boat by the end of the day.

I was also surprised there weren't more young people, because it's such a fantastic opportunity. It was great to see so many different islands and dream about camping on one or more of them. Joining a cleanup was a perfect way to make connections and build community. I highly recommend it, and it's even more fun when you bring a friend!

THE MITA APP



- All 258 Trail Sites, with photos
- Interactive, GPS enabled NOAA chart of Maine coast
- Anchorage and tide information
- Downloadable maps for offline use
- Track your Trail site visits through My Trail
- Over 150 launch sites and marina services
- Current MITA members receive a passcode for full access.
- Available on Apple and Android devices



This summer, MITA's staff and volunteers will make over

1,500 LANDINGS

on Trail sites to: Clean shorelines of marine debris • Keep campsites and trails clear of fallen trees and other hazards • Identify and mitigate invasive plant infestations • Monitor island use and conditions • Educate visitors about Leave No Trace recreation

Visit mita.org/donate to support this vital work

MITA VOLUNTEERING

FAQs

Have you been curious about volunteering, but haven't been sure about how to get involved or if it's the right fit for you? We've rounded up answers to the most frequently asked questions about volunteering for MITA!

Where do I sign up to volunteer?

Check out mita.org/volunteer to see a list of upcoming outings where we could use your help! If you don't see something that works with your schedule, check again soon as we're always adding new opportunities.

Will we be out all day long?

Most of MITA's volunteer outings launch mid-morning (8-9am or so, depending on tides) and will end around 3-4pm. Plenty of time to get home before dinner!

Can I bring my kids?

We absolutely love having young volunteers! We suggest checking with our stewardship staff (email: stewards@mita.org) ahead of time to make sure the nature of a particular work day is suitable for your kids.

There's a work day further up the coast, but that seems like a long ways to go for a day trip. Is it worth it?

Maine's Downeast region is an absolutely spectacular part of the coast. We highly encourage MITA members to visit the area, and many of our Downeast volunteer opportunities will offer camping options. Make an adventure of it! Send an email to stewards@mita.org to ask about a specific outing.



A Site for More Eyes

By Nick Parson, Communications Manager

Has it been a while since you navigated to MITA's website? If that's the case, then we suggest you head over to mita.org as soon as you've finished reading this issue of The Island Trail. Whenever the time comes, you'll find that MITA's "home port" in the great sea of the internet has undergone quite the transformation.

This past March, we unveiled an all-new website that had been in development over the course of the long Maine winter. To say that it looks "a little different" is an understatement: it looks very different, and we couldn't be happier about it. The most exciting part is that you, as a MITA member, stand to benefit from these improvements. Our new website is easier to use; has more information; and has an entirely different look and feel that is reflective of the beauty of the Trail and the incredible work that our volunteers do to keep it healthy and thriving.

While we are certainly an outdoor organization and many of our members enjoy getting away from their web-connected devices as much as possible, a proper website that provides a solid representation of us and "feels like MITA"

is so important in helping us achieve all that we want to as an association. For a lot of people, the website might be their first interaction with MITA and how they find out about us in the first place. Initial impressions are everything, so it's critical that mita.org provides a proper introduction. Our new site does this on a number of levels, and we're excited to see where it takes us.

The old website was a solidly reliable tool for a long time, without a doubt. However, we were long overdue for a big change. Care to do a little comparison of then vs. now? One of the niftiest tools on the internet, the Wayback Machine, can be found at archive.org/web. You can use it to search old versions of various websites from all across the internet, and see what mita.org looked

(CONT. PAGE 18)

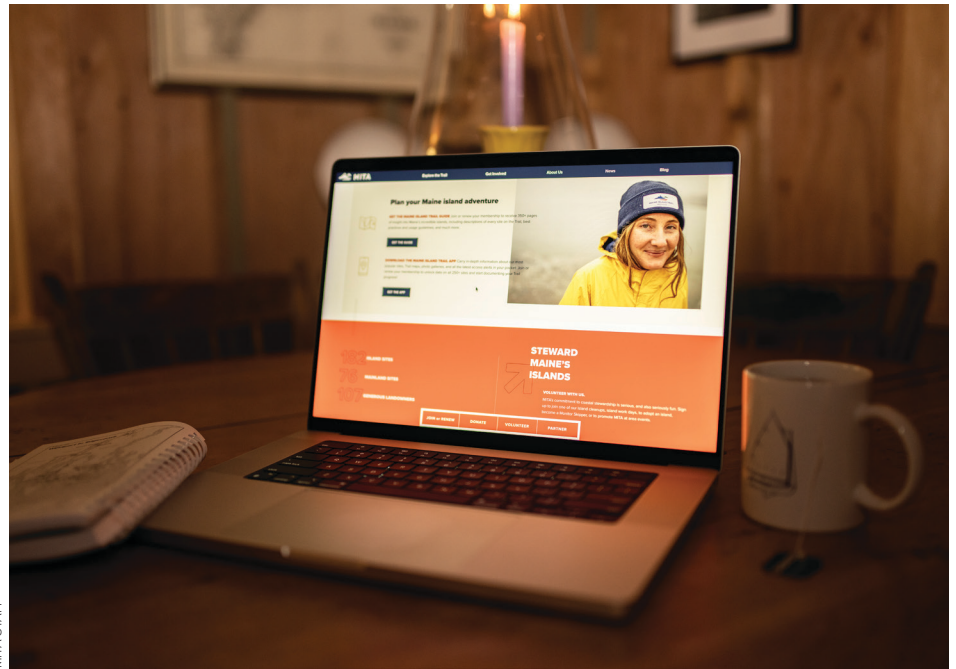
like all the way back in 1997. Our new site places a much higher emphasis on imagery and showing off the beauty of the Maine Island Trail. Something as inspiring as the Trail really does deserve to be shown off, and now we have the perfect tool for doing just that.

It's not all about looks, though. Our goal was to build not only a website that was elevated to the standards of our new branding, but also create something that would serve as the best possible touchpoint for MITA members to interact with us online. We wanted it to be easier to renew memberships; register for cleanups and workdays; discover membership benefits and discounts; and get news about what's happening with MITA. We're thankful to have landed in a place where form and function are able to work side by side. For that, we give a lot of credit to our friends who built the site: Springtide Studio and side.sea agency. Their guidance and vision helped us get to where we are, and we are delighted with the end result.

In truth, however, there is no end result with **mita.org**. It's going to change, grow, and morph with time. We're renewing

our commitment to online member engagement through our new site, and we would love for you to be a part of that. On the homepage, you'll see that we want you to "share your Maine island story." We want to know what you're doing out on the Trail and how MITA is a part of your lives here on the coast of Maine. We want to be

able to share it far and wide through **mita.org**. So please engage with us and help us make our new online home as much a reflection of you, our members, as it is of us as an organization. Thanks again, as always, for your support of MITA and everything you do to help us on the Trail, online, and beyond!



MITA STAFF

MITA's all-new website offers members a deeper virtual connection to us than ever before.



The logo features a stylized white graphic of a mountain range with a boat below it, set against a blue background. Below the graphic, the text "MITA" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font, followed by a large "X" and the word "Flowfold" in a white, cursive script font with a registered trademark symbol.

Check out our new partnership with Maine-based outdoor gear makers **Flowfold**, who are offering a line of MITA-branded goods for all of your summer adventures!

A portion of the proceeds from all sales will go towards supporting MITA's programming.

Learn more and order now at mita.org/flowfold

TRAIL TAKES

Whether you find yourself on the Maine Island Trail for recreation or stewardship, always take a second to stop and look more closely. There is beauty to be found in the smallest of details.



MITA.ORG