

Important: Belle Isle Park Opening, Saturday September 6

Heron Census Dates

(details page 6)



Belle Isle News

Newsletter of the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

No. 12 JUNE 1986

ANOTHER SILENT DANGER

In late April, 2000 gallons of a highly flammable and toxic substance were discovered by the Winthrop Fire Department on land adjacent to Belle Isle Marsh. To begin with, the Fire Department had responded to an emergency on Veteran's Road, where a mechanic working for the Bonacorso Construction Company had suddenly passed out and fallen off the truck on which he had been working. Firefighters discovered six drums filled with Methyl Methacrylate in the back of the truck; fumes from these drums had injured the mechanic. The victim was treated at Winthrop Hospital.

The Fire Department ordered the barrels removed from the site and from the town. In checking the company's lot on Morton Street, next to Belle Isle Marsh, where the barrels were to be temporarily stored until relocation, Fire Chief Charles Flanagan reported finding 34 more barrels of the same substance stored under a makeshift roof on the premises.

On Friday, May 2, the Fire Department issued a formal order that over two thousand gallons of the chemical be removed from the town.

The *Boston Globe's* report on the situation on Saturday, May 3, did not appear in the Winthrop edition of the paper. This caused many people in Winthrop to remain

ignorant of the silent threat to their town and to Belle Isle Marsh. Fortunately, town officials, such as Chief Flanagan, and state officials, such as the Attorney General's Office, reacted quickly, expediting a nearly immediate removal of the substance from Winthrop.

Chief Flanagan notified several community fire departments of the situation when he learned that they were potential targets



Protective clothing and masks were needed to pump out Methyl Methacrylate from the barrels safely.

for relocation of the chemical. Although early reports stated that the Attorney General's Office had banned the substance from state boundaries, other sources have said that the chemical is being stored in

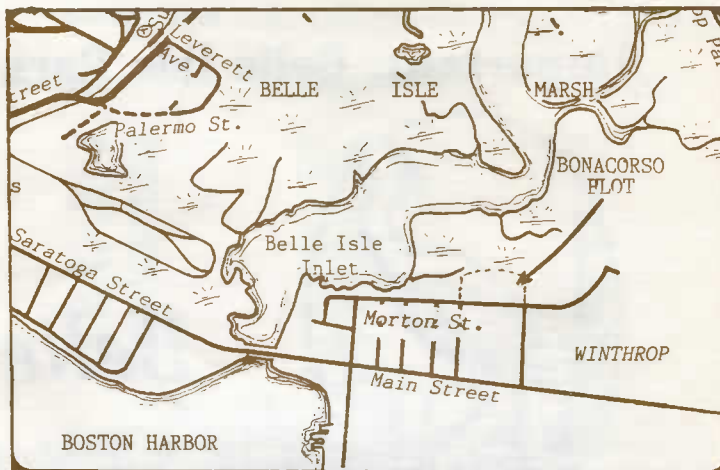
Boston, where storage was initially refused.

The Methyl Methacrylate on Bonacorso's land was to be used on a Turnpike Authority bridge repair contract. For reasons of insurance liability, the Authority does not allow contractors to store any equipment or materials on its property. Sources familiar with the application of the material insisted that it was, for all intents and purposes, safe. The substance has been used in this state for three or four years without incident. The chemical is ten times as expensive as concrete; it is used mainly on heavily travelled bridges, as it causes concrete to harden four times as fast as it normally would.

Flanagan's fear was aroused primarily by the quantity of the substance. He states that only two other states (New York and New Jersey) allow the use of the chemical as a hardening agent on bridge repair work. The *Emergency Response Handbook for Hazardous Materials* classifies the substance as highly flammable and toxic. It is known to have a flashpoint of 50° Fahrenheit; leaking vapors, being heavier than air, could travel to a source of ignition, then flash back to the containers. In that case, it might be necessary to isolate an area of half a mile in all directions because of poisonous vapors emanating from the inferno. The Morton Street site is less than this distance from both points of exit in the Town of Winthrop. In the most serious of circumstances the guidebook suggests that firefighters would be forced to evacuate residents and let the fire burn out. An extreme case, yes, but the potential lay in our back yards.

Recent disasters should remind us to look and think harder about our surroundings. Practical industrial advantages will overwhelm issues of public safety unless we become community watchdogs. Ours is a polluted world, but we would be foolish to trade our well-being and safety for economic advantage. To accept the secret storage of Methyl Methacrylate in Winthrop is to accept the disaster at Chernobyl as a sign of the times.

Michael Dooley



Where it all happened.

BACK TO COURT

May 13 was an unlucky day for Mr. Anthony Bonacorso. On that day the Environmental Division of the Attorney General's Office filed a summons and contempt complaint against the Bonacorso Construction Company for failure to obey court orders issued on January 28, 1986. A temporary restraining order was also imposed to prevent any construction activity within one hundred feet of Belle Isle Marsh.

The contempt complaint alleges that Mr. Bonacorso violated the January court order which had instructed him to pull back and stabilize the boundaries of his Morton Street land. Many neighbors, as well as Winthrop officials and members of Friends of Belle Isle Marsh, had noticed that, far from pulling back, Mr. Bonacorso appeared to be filling more of the marsh, and installing rip-rap all along the edge. Then when people were investigating the Methyl Methacrylate affair, they noticed that new concrete seemed to be added beyond the rip-rap line. Finally, the surveyor's results came in, and the Attorney General's Office agreed that indeed there appeared to be a violation of the court order and of the salt marsh.

If Bonacorso is found guilty of contempt, he is liable for a \$1000 a day noncompliance fine. We trust the Attorney General's Office will prosecute this case, and collect the fine, in order to discourage such flagrant disregard for environmental laws.

CLOUDS OF EGRETS

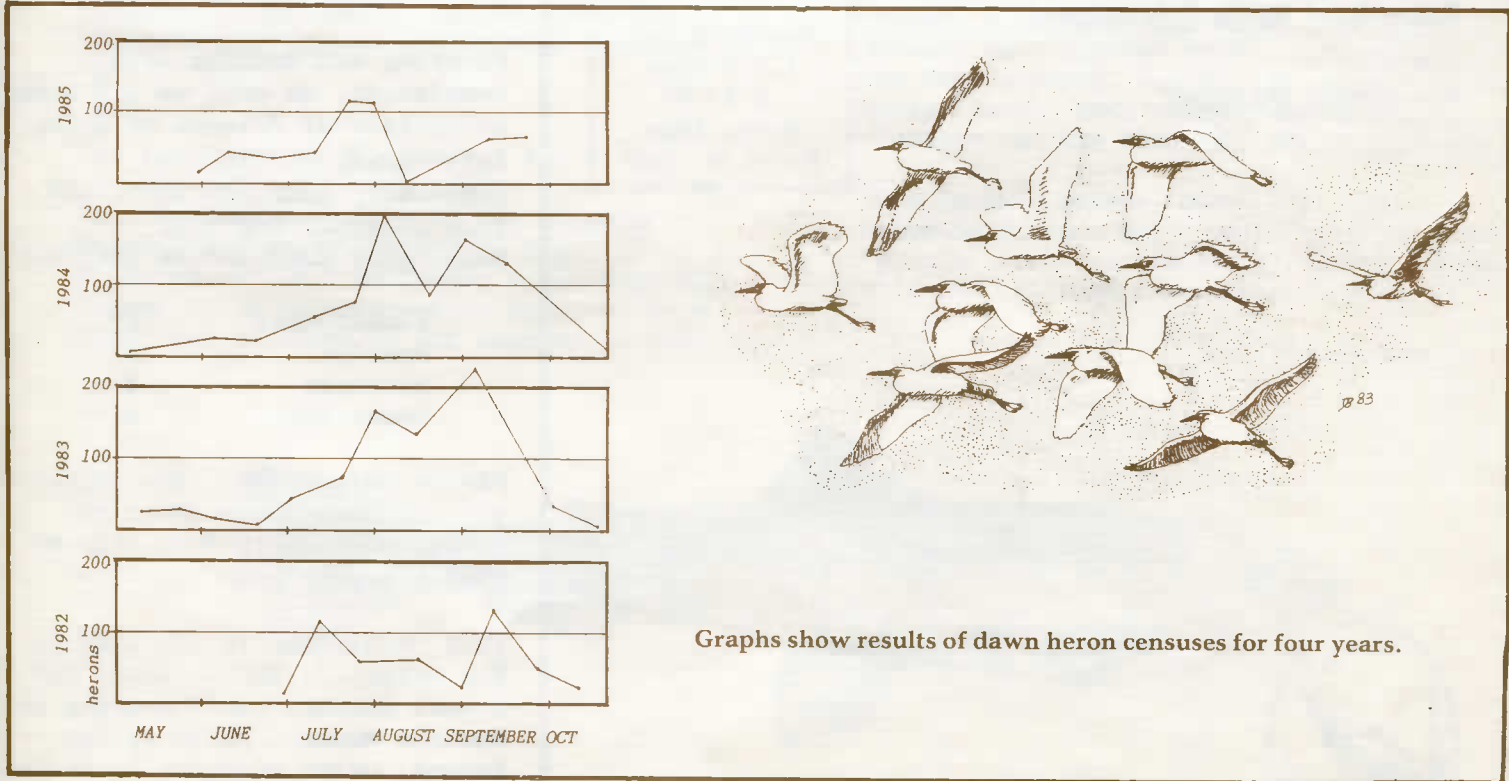
A Snowy Egret (or any other heron) in an urban area seems out of place or "lost" to many people. Such large, long-legged, lovely birds are thought to belong in Florida, or some other "exotic" place, but certainly not in Greater Boston. The facts, however, are that they are here, they are widespread, and they are roosting and breeding on the Boston Harbor Islands (see table of breeding herons, next page), and they are feeding regularly in Belle Isle Marsh. At times "clouds" of 40 or 50 egrets can be seen flying into, over, or by the marsh. The price of viewing this wondrous scene? Well, you have to get there half an hour before sunrise to join our egret censuses!

This is our fifth year of counting egrets. We have concentrated on this particular member of the heron family as we have found it to be either more numerous or easier to monitor than its relatives -- the night-herons, who actually outnumber them, the Great Egrets, Little Blue Herons, and Green-backed Herons.

From our observations a definite feeding pattern is apparent. When the egrets awaken on the islands, they look for food.

If the tide is low, they can often feed standing ankle-deep in island shallows. But if the tide is high, they spread out to the upper reaches of marshes for better hunting. Thus our biggest counts occur when daybreak and high tide coincide. The most popular feeding spots are the tidal pools stocked with small fish by the incoming tide -- trapped and easy prey for these long-necked, head-bobbing waders. And what a show the egrets put on when they find these concentrations of fry! They dance and prance and lunge, occasionally even attacking each other in their feeding frenzy.

Egret numbers at the marsh vary not only in relation to daily tidal rhythms but also in connection with breeding cycles and migration habits. (See graphs.) Each year as the migrants begin arriving in early spring their numbers at Belle Isle remain low from mid-April to late May. During this period they are busy with nesting activities on the islands and, once the eggs are laid, only one parent can leave at a time. In June when the young hatch, both parents fly back and forth repeatedly to provide regurgitated food for their hungry nestlings. Toward the end of June the young themselves begin to fly around, and soon entire family



Graphs show results of dawn heron censuses for four years.

BREEDING HERONS OF BOSTON HARBOR

SPECIES	BREEDING PAIRS-1986
Snowy Egret	85
Little Blue Heron	1
Black-crowned Night-Heron	240
Glossy Ibis	12

Herons bred on Spectacle, Middle Brewster, and Calf Islands. Information courtesy of Professor Jeremy Hatch, University of Massachusetts, Boston.

groups wing their way together in numbers swelling to produce a peak in the second half of July. Then as the summer progresses, many scatter to other areas in "post-breeding dispersal." Finally, around the beginning of September, those that had dispersed northward begin their waves of southward migration and concentrate at preferred stops along the way. This produces the second peak at Belle Isle in early September. By mid-October they have all left. Unlike the Great Blue Heron, not a straggler remains to spend the winter here.

* * * * *

Our heron censuses provide a wonderful excuse to be out at dawn regularly throughout the summer. The early morning sights, sounds and smells cannot be duplicated at any other time. We recommend you come and see for yourself.

Soheil Zende
Esther Fich

CALL FOR HELP

Commissioner William Geary of MDC has announced plans to install a network of emergency callboxes on metropolitan Boston roads and in MetroPark reservations by this summer. We hope this will encourage all members of the public who observe illegal activities such as the use of firearms, illegal dumping, and damage to wildlife or plants to report to MetroPolice quickly.

In January, many of you mailed cards to Michael Deland, Regional Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), urging him to put the protection of Attleboro's Sweeden Swamp above the profits of Pyramid Corporation, which was proposing to build a shopping mall there. In March Deland recommended denial of the Pyramid permit to the national office of the EPA, based on his judgement that alternative sites for this development exist. The national office concurred in a decision issued on May 13, and now the stage is set for the developer to try to fight the matter in the courts.

So, for now, there is a victory for the Coalition to Save Sweeden Swamp. But stay tuned, there'll be more!

OUR PLATFORM

The Osprey platform has risen again!

Those of you who helped us build and erect the Osprey pole last year, and those who supported this effort, were disappointed when it went down, a victim of vandalism, last May.

This year, we decided to ask the MBTA for help. We reasoned that if the platform was installed inside the fenced MBTA yard overlooking the marsh, the location might discourage would-be vandals from bothering it. In response to our request, the MBTA came through with flying colors. A sturdy telephone pole was used as the base, and the platform was erected on April 28.

We wish to thank the following managers, engineers, and employees of the MBTA: Messrs. John Leary, Ed Rowe, and William Bregoli; Ms. Kandy Lydon, and Messrs. Edmund Mitchell, Frank Dutton, Dan Sullivan, Tom Murphy, Mike Lisenby, Bill Drago, Vin Natale, Pat Woodford, and Pablo Rodriguez.

One other item of pleasant news: The MBTA has agreed to rename the new Suffolk Downs Station of its Blue Line "Suffolk Downs/Belle Isle."

SMELT

We don't fish for smelt much any more in Belle Isle Creek. That's because there don't seem to be many smelt there anymore. And the problem may lie not so much in the fishes as in ourselves.

Until very recent years, on almost any winter's night when the tide was up, you could find twenty or more fishermen — boys, young men, or senior gents (and me) — lined up at the rails of the little bridge on Bennington Street or poised along the banks of the creek, seeking to hook the slender, silvery wonder called smelt. More than a few local tables have been graced by this simple and delicious resource that Belle Isle Creek and its adjacent marsh had to offer. Ah, the pleasant aroma on a cold morning, of fresh smelt crisping in hot fat, and onions and potatoes doing likewise on another burner — a breakfast such as bacon-and-egg eaters know nothing about! Smelt are also terrific for lunch or dinner, but I have a particular penchant for them at the morning meal. To each his own!

Back to the smelt themselves. Simply put, they are gone. They have not been here for three or four winters now, not since construction began on the Sales Creek Pumping Station across the street. Frankie from Everett, Al from Revere, Tony from Wakefield, Sal and Joe from East Boston, Sebastiani and Marco from Winthrop — none of us catch smelt here now. Furthermore, we have lost the simple and happy camaraderie that once was ours to enjoy.

* * * * *

The common native smelt is the Atlantic Silverside (*Menidia menidia*), found in estuarine waters from Canada to southern New Jersey. It is an andromadous species, which means that it lives in the seas but travels up

streams and creeks to spawn and reproduce. It is usually silvery below, light green above, and averages four to six inches long.

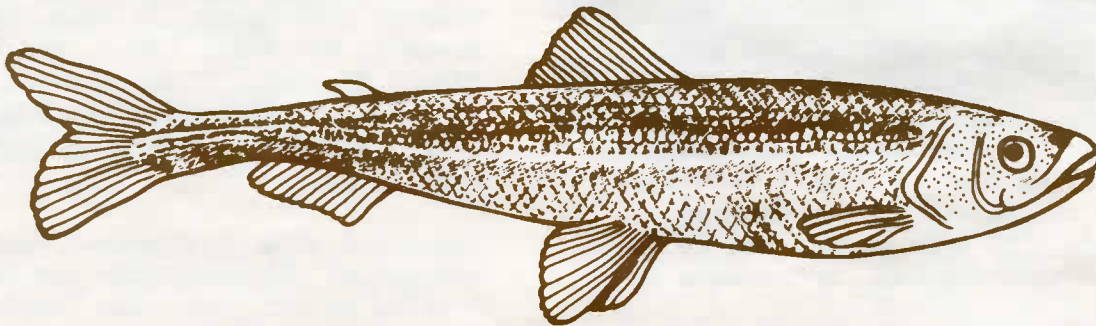
Smelt are not one of the world's great game fish, like tuna, blue marlin, or wahoo, or tarpin, or even striped bass. Smelt fishing is to sport fishing what pizza is to dinner at the Ritz, or homespun is to silk. Nevertheless, they were a valuable, simple, satisfying resource that Belle Isle provided. And now, apparently, they're gone.

They were certainly not fished out by heavy pressure from anglers, for their absence from the head of Belle Isle Creek has been too sudden and complete. We are left only to infer that "something" caused an unusually abrupt demise of the smelt population in Belle Isle. Was it pollution? Was it the construction of the pumping station? Who knows! Simply put, an important part of Belle Isle's natural fishery is no more — and may never return. Not just the smelt but all of us are the lesser for it. They don't come back to reproduce, and the other guys and I don't have smelt for breakfast much any more — a selfish but sensible rationale for concern.

These musings have not focused on the flounder and the blue fish resources that Belle Isle and adjacent waters still provide. What is to become of them? The quality of life for our human species is a blend of seemingly small, unrelated, and unimportant elements — as it is also for our fellow creatures on this planet, even the lowly smelt. But each element is a crucial factor in the whole of our environmental fabric. No segment is unimportant! What affects the smelt, the flounder, or the bluefish, affects you and me.

"Who cares?" someone might ask. Al, Sebastiani, Tony and I care. And the smelt care, if only instinctively, from a passion more ancient than our pursuit of them.

Kermit Norris



FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE

The following field trips have been scheduled to start at 2 PM. Please meet at the entrance to Belle Isle Marsh Reservation on Bennington Street, East Boston (half-way between Suffolk Downs and Beachmont MBTA Stations). Dress warmly and wear waterproof footwear.

Sunday, July 13
Saturday, July 26
Sunday, August 10
Saturday, August 23
Sunday, September 7
Sunday, September 21
Saturday, October 4

Field trips are free and open to the public. Please call the following trip leaders for further information.

David Desmond 324-7527
Soheil Zendehe 628-8990



DATES FOR THE 1986 DAWN HERON CENSUSES

Date	Sunrise	High Tide
JUN 29	5:10	6:00
JUL 13	5:20	4:15
JUL 27	5:30	4:30
AUG 10	5:45	3:00
AUG 24	6:00	3:00
SEP 14	6:25	8:30
SEP 28	6:40	7:45
OCT 12	6:55	7:15

Please meet one-half hour before sunrise. Come to Palermo Street, East Boston, right by the big wooden Belle Isle Reservation sign. For more information, call Soheil Zendehe at 628-8990.

BELLE ISLE PARK

Come celebrate the official opening of this unique MDC reservation on Saturday, September 6. For many people in the community this will be the culmination of a decades-long dream. The festivities begin at the park at 11 AM. Watch for more details in the press.

Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

P O. Box 575
East Boston, MA 02128

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
P A I D
Boston, Mass.
Permit No. 3225

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Printing and mailing this newsletter, as well as all other activities of Friends of Belle Isle Marsh, is financed by membership dues and donations from generous members.

Membership dues are as follows:

Individual:	\$3
Family:	\$5
Seniors:	\$1
Under 16:	\$1

Please join today. Any amount you can contribute above and beyond membership dues will be highly appreciated.

This newsletter is produced by Tim Driscoll, Esther Fich, and Soheil Zendehe. Smelt drawing by Carlene Meeker. Photo by Joe Person. Other graphics by Denise Braunhardt.

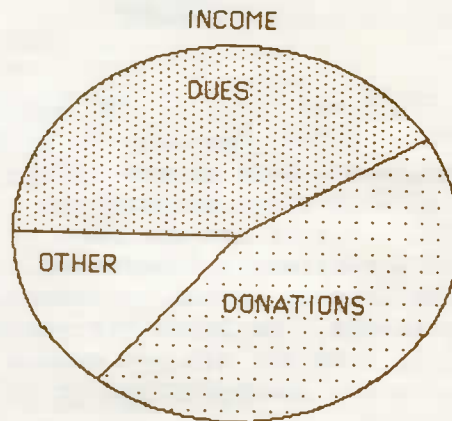


FINANCES

This report covers Fiscal 1985, from March 17, 1985, to March 5 1986.

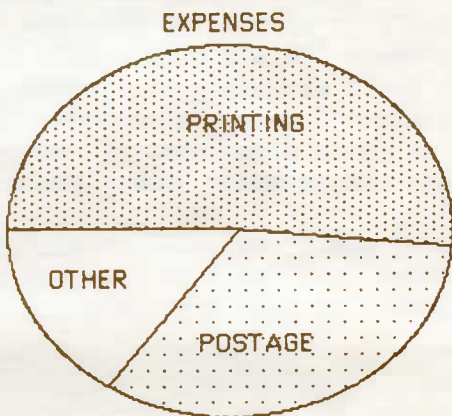
INCOME:

Membership dues	\$793.00
Donations	890.68
Other: Paper drive	253.00
Bird Observer	50.00
TOTAL	\$1,986.68



EXPENSES:

Printing	\$957.76
Postage	599.11
Other: Donations	95.00
Dues	25.00
Fees	50.00
Books & maps	25.00
Osprey pole	82.33
Miscellaneous	10.00
TOTAL	\$1,844.20



Beginning balance 3/17/85	\$171.68
Income	1,986.68
Expenses	1,844.20

Ending balance 3/5/86	\$314.16

* * * * *

In Fiscal 1985, our principal sources of income were membership dues and donations. Our major expenditures were printing and postage for the newsletter. The income pie-chart illustrates the importance of donations to FBIM. For every \$1.00 of membership dues paid, we received about \$1.12 in donations.

I thank our members for your generosity, and encourage increased financial support in our current fiscal year.

Ann Lindsey, Treasurer

FUND-RAISING

The response to our request for funds to fight the Zoppo development has been phenomenal. Clearly, many of you agree that we should be prepared to take any legal action necessary to stop the immense threats to Belle Isle Marsh that this kind of development plan represents.

We are negotiating with an attorney who is well versed in development law to represent us at reduced rates. Needless to say, would-be developers of increasingly valuable land around Winthrop can afford to spend a tremendous amount on legal fees. So, despite any reduced fees being offered by an attorney, we could conceivably need many dollars for attorney's fees to keep the developers at bay. Please keep the support coming.

MEETINGS AND MEMBERSHIP

Robert Finch was the featured speaker at our March 9 Annual Meeting. He gave a rousing presentation on the tricks and byways of open-space acquisition. A political activist and chairman of the Brewster Conservation Commission, Finch is also a well-known author on natural history themes. He ended his presentation by reading from one his own essays on the philosophy and underpinnings of conservation.

Members who attended the meeting had the opportunity to elect new officers and board members for the year. (See below for list of Board of Directors members.) Members also renewed their membership for 1986. The whole event was, as usual, capped by refreshments and a social hour.

It is time for those of you could not join us to renew now. As you know, we try to keep membership dues low in order to keep

Friends of Belle Isle truly a grassroots, community organization. At the same time, we have tried to keep many people and organizations on our mailing list because we felt our newsletter and other materials we mail would be of interest to them, even though they do not pay dues. The costs of producing and mailing this material being what they are, we encourage you to rejoin as soon as possible, and be extra generous in giving us additional donations. (See financial report elsewhere on this sheet.) In the near future, we may be forced to trim our mailing list by eliminating the names of those who do not pay dues.

Please take a moment to fill out the enclosed form and mail it back to us with a check. We'll mail your membership card, and of course you'll continue to receive our quarterly newsletter. (If you have already rejoined for 1986, please ignore this notice.)

Remember, all contributions to Friends of Belle Isle Marsh are tax-deductible.

**FRIENDS OF BELLE ISLE MARSH
BOARD OF DIRECTORS - 1986**

TITLE	NAME	PHONE
President	Gail C. Miller	567-5072
Vice Pres.	John Kilmartin	846-1480
Treasurer	Ann Lindsey	846-7416
Secretary	Soheil Zende	628-8990
Member-at-large	Deborah Farnsworth	846-2587
Member-at-large	Conal Foley	846-0786
Member-at-large	Ellen Koretz	846-4238
Member-at-large	Cindy Stebbins	284-9288

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Membership Secy	Rose Corrado	567-5854
Fund-raising	Carole Atkinson	846-4095
Outdoors	David Desmond	324-7527
Publications	Tim Driscoll	625-0685
Conservation	Craig Jackson	321-4382

