



NONPOINT SOURCE TIMES

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Ice Cream & Outreach?

How the Friends of Cobbosee Watershed Utilize an Ice Cream Boat to Raise Awareness

With children dancing to Calypso music blasting from its portside speakers, the OTTER pulls closer to the dock on a steamy July afternoon on Lake Cobbosseecontee. The OTTER, a 20 foot pontoon boat, is in essence a floating Ice Cream Shoppe. With two on-board freezers stocked with a full compliment of Hershey's Ice Cream, the OTTER has become a welcome site to boaters and residents alike during the warm summer days of Maine.

But the OTTER is much more than an ice cream vessel. Although crew members can recite the ice cream selection from memory, they also provide information and guidance to landowners and lake users alike on what they can do to help combat two of the major enemies facing our lakes and streams: non-point source pollution and invasive plants.

The Friends of the Cobbossee Watershed was established in 2001 by a group of concerned citizens who lived, worked, and recreated on several of the 28 water bodies that comprise the 217-square mile Cobbossee Watershed, located in central Maine. Believing that significant exposure was necessary to enlist widespread involvement, the Board of Directors decided on a unique approach to raise awareness – the selling of Ice Cream! The OTTER was born.

With funding support from the Unity Foundation of Unity, ME, whose grant-making focuses on building capacity within non-profits, and major sponsorship from Clark Marine of Manchester, ME, the OTTER was launched during the summer of 2002 and became an immediate hit. Hundreds of residents and boaters were provided information on water issues, and the boat quickly raised the visibility of the *Friends* and their mission. Several newspapers ran major news stories on the OTTER, and Bill Green of Channel 6 was so intrigued that he produced a segment on his program, "The Green Outdoors".



The summer of 2003 brought about even greater results – thousands of customers received information on the issues, which resulted in nearly **400** new members joining the *Friends* membership ranks. In addition to doubling the number of lakes served from four in 2002 to eight in 2003, visibility of both the OTTER and the *Friends* was increased by several factors:

- Adding music, banners and advertising to the OTTER made it more distinguishable from other pontoon boats on the lakes.
- Adding freezer capacity and utilizing dry ice increased our operating hours.
- Enlisting OTTER hosts – lake residents that offered docking and electricity (for freezers) for the

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

OTTER during non-operating hours.

- Securing a known Ice Cream provider (Hershey's) that also provided equipment and marketing support.

Bob Moore, Executive Director for the Friends says, "The OTTER has done more for our organization than ever imagined. Approaching environmental stewardship in a non-threatening manner like selling ice cream has enabled us to engage the public in ways that we believe would have taken years using traditional approaches."

"There definitely have been some 'lessons learned' the hard way," added Moore. "From initially trying a generator to supplementing the freezers with dry ice; to timing our schedule on various lakes to coincide with lake association annual meetings and other events, we continue to look for maximum results. In 2004, we plan to add two additional lakes to our schedule, and also initiate a morning educational program aboard the OTTER for elementary age kids, somewhat along the lines of what the Maine Lakes Conservancy Institute offers."



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