



# Belle Isle News

Newsletter of the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

DECEMBER 1984

## PLAIN TALK ON SALES CREEK

When the environment becomes hazardous to other living beings, it's a good bet it will also be bad for human beings. That is the simplified message of the environmental movement.

We are prompted to reiterate this message because of the confusion among some readers about our stand on the Sales Creek Pumping Station issue. If fish, birds, and other wildlife in Belle Isle Marsh will be harmed by pollutants and bacterial contamination from the waters of Sales Creek -- as is apparent from reading the Environmental Impact Report from 1978, and the current Environmental Mitigation Report -- then people will also be harmed. People are living things!

The solution, as the Commonwealth has continually promised, and many thoughtful people have demanded, is to complete the Sales Creek Flood Control Project as originally proposed in the 1978 EIR and the current document from Camp Dresser McKee. But to do this, all of us -- Beachmonters, Winthropites, East Bostonians, environmentalists, and Belle Isle enthusiasts -- must be willing to sit together and draft a common set of demands for the Commonwealth:

1. The upper reaches of Sales and Green Creeks should be cleaned, culverted, and otherwise improved for the flow, rather than the hinderance, of flood waters.
2. The toxic sediments in all creek beds must be removed and disposed of in a safe manner.
3. Funds need to be budgeted for the maintenance of this system -- to keep it clear of debris and to periodically clear it of new toxic materials.

These are our suggestions. They are no more nor less than the plan suggested by the state-hired consulting firm. It is time to get on with it.

Board of Directors  
Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

# ICE

Ice is pretty amazing stuff. It can chill your cocktail, soothe your hang-over, or preserve a vital human organ for transplant. You can skate on it, wreck your car sliding on it, or drill a hole in it to fish in February. Irrespective of what you can do with, on, or to it, ice also has its own capacity to make and remake the natural world.

Ice instrumentally shaped nearly the entire coastal landscape of New England. And ice created Belle Isle Marsh. Some 15,000 years ago, Belle Isle Marsh and most of New England were covered by a mile-thick ice cap. What we know and cherish today as Belle Isle is the direct result of the melting and withdrawal of that ice cap over many years.

The Ice Age left a nearly indelible imprint of deep harbor channels surrounded by wetlands and small, elliptical hills called drumlins. Several thousand years later, when the first European settlers arrived in Massachusetts Bay, they found a coastland virtually unchanged since the retreat of the

ice cap -- a geography marked by tidal wetlands and drumlins, including Revere's Beachmont, Winthrop Highlands, and East Boston's Orient Heights. Here they settled, and three hundred years of habitation and human engineering have brought about remarkable changes in the landscape they found.

Boston's Back Bay was once a tidal marshland, but in the nineteenth century it was filled and built upon to expand the city's habitation space. Logan Airport is built upon what was once a maze of four islands: Governors, Apple, Noddle, and Bird -- all of which were once loosely connected by tidal creeks and marshlands. Most of the North End and the Quincy Market-Faneuil Hall area was marshy wetlands, as was Suffolk Downs Racetrack -- evident in its annual shutdown to resurface and rebuild a track that wants to sink and again become a part of Belle Isle Marsh. Revere's Beachmont School is built upon filled-in portions of Belle Isle Marsh, which may explain its current water and sewer system problems. This landscape has not forgotten that it is soft, changing marshland.



Boston in 1775



All this then, merely to suggest both the historical and environmental significance of Belle Isle Marsh. No didactic lessons about birds, fish, reptiles, or plant-life are raised here. The issue is the preservation of the landscape of human history. If we want to celebrate and preserve the sites of the Boston Tea Party, the Battle of Bunker Hill, the Boston Massacre, as well as the clipper ship industry and Back Bay architecture, perhaps we should want to put equal emphasis and energy into preserving our geographic history. Belle Isle Marsh is uniquely manageable in that regard.

Even if birds, snakes, plants, fish, and mammals are not convincing reasons for conserving and protecting Belle Isle, can we not see and appreciate these three hundred acres as a remarkable repository of the ebb and flow of nature? In the middle of our city is a continuing reminder of the geography which the Ice Age left for our ancestors to discover.

Kermit Norris

#### BELLE ISLE: A COUNTRY WALK

Belle Isle Marsh gets great press in the latest Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) book, More Country Walks Around Boston. One entire chapter is all about Belle Isle, its social and natural history, and its importance to all of us as an open urban recreational area.

The book was written by one of our members, William Scheller, and is on sale through the AMC, 3 Joy Street, Boston, MA 02108.

#### WE'RE NON-PROFIT

A great deal of hard work by our treasurer, Barbara Gard, assisted by attorney Andrew McGinnis, has resulted in Friends of Belle Isle Marsh, Inc. being recognized as a non-profit corporation by the Internal Revenue Service. We owe Barbara and Andrew a great debt of gratitude.

The most significant practical results of this decision are: (a) we can now receive tax-deductible contributions (a hint to all you folks out there waiting to make end-of-the-tax-year contributions); and (b) we can now mail our newsletter at the lower non-profit bulk rates.



Clean-up Trophy: Ditchdigger

#### REVERE CLEAN-UP

Q: What do the Mayor of Revere, a fraternity at MIT, and a Boston office secretary, along with 60 other assorted people have in common?

A: Enough concern about a clean and beautiful environment to give up a gorgeous Saturday to drag mattresses, piano sounding boards, an outboard motor, an antique ditchdigger, a cut-up truck chassis, and innumerable other pieces of trash out of Belle Isle Marsh at Short Beach and Summer Street, Revere. In all, on October 20, fifteen dump-truck loads of debris were removed. The result is an even more beautiful marsh we can take a great deal of pride in.

Our special thanks go to: John Marino, Craig Jackson, and Gail Miller for coordinating the whole thing; Lynn Mazzarella for serving as community liaison; Mayor Collela, DPW chief Henry Trifoni, and the DPW crew from Revere; Commissioner Geary, Dotty O'Malley, Mario Traficante, and the MDC crew; the National Guard equipment crew; the DPW contingent from Winthrop; Reardon's Restaurant for providing lunches for the cleaners; the Community Service Committee of MIT's Zeta Psi Fraternity; and all the other crew-members, contact persons, and volunteers who gave so much of themselves to make this day a success.

Remember, when we give a clean-up, everybody has fun. Join us next time!

## FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE

The following field trips have been scheduled to start at 1 PM. Please meet at the entrance to Belle Isle Marsh Reservation on Bennington Street, East Boston. Dress warmly and wear waterproof footwear.

Saturday, January 12  
Sunday, February 10  
Saturday, March 9

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

David Desmond	324-7527
Kermit Norris	567-2339
Soheil Zende	628-8990

The winning photos will be on display at our membership meeting in March. Thank you for entering this competition, and we hope you will enter again next year. Watch for the announcement of the 1985 Belle Isle Photo Competition in our newsletter.

## RECYCLE

Members of Friends of Belle Isle Marsh are managing the newspaper collection trailer for the Recycling Subcommittee of the Winthrop Energy Resources Commission until the end of December. Ninety percent of the proceeds from the sale of the recycled paper will go directly into our treasury, with the other ten percent being used to pay the costs of administering the program.

We urge all citizens of Winthrop and surrounding communities to take their old newspapers to the recycling center at the DPW yard across from the Winthrop Public Library at Metcalf Square.

In addition, volunteers are needed to help daily at the collection site. If you can be of assistance, please call: John Kilmartin, 846-1480; or Simon Fich, 846-9097.

Save trees and help Belle Isle Marsh at the same time.

This newsletter was produced by Pat Hickey and Soheil Zende. Map of Boston in 1775 from William Gordon's The History of the Rise, Progress, and Independence of the United States, Vol. 2, London, 1788. Clean-up photo by Craig Jackson.

## PHOTO COMPETITION WINNERS

The Board of Directors of the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh, acting as judges, have chosen the following winners in our photo competition:

Scenery: Daniel Croce, Revere  
\$15 Gift Certificate; BEST ENTRY

Animals: Nancy Nugent, Revere  
Plants: Linda Voto  
General: Hugh MacIsaac, Winthrop  
\$10 Gift Certificates

Abstract: Joanne McKenna, Revere  
Honorable Mention

Gift Certificates were provided by Hunt Drug Company, 500 Main Street, Malden, "New England's most unusual camera store."

## Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

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