

CONA TODAY

CITIZENS OFFERING NEW ALTERNATIVES

Spring 2006

P.O. Box 649 , Newcastle, ME 04553

The Tipping Point

With the pressing political and social issues confronting our nation and community, with an ongoing illegal war and an administration blind to the needs of its citizens, it is easy for the most serious crisis facing our world to casually slip through the cracks. The loss of the earth, an entity we impersonally call "our environment", continues to languish beneath the surface of public discourse, facing a decline that many scientists now feel is reaching a tipping point of irreversibility.

In indicator after indicator, in the loss of fisheries, sea grasses, coral reefs, and micro-plankton needed for the viability of ocean life, in the buildup of greenhouse gases responsible for global warm-ing, in the destruction of polar ice caps, rainforests, wetlands, and in the loss of the earth's diversity of species from songbirds to mammals, humans are outstripping the earth's ability to sustain itself.

Our generation sits on a point of balance. As D.H. Lawrence said, "We are cut off from a unison with the sun and earth... We are bleeding at the roots."

As CONA begins its 25th year, we reaffirm our commitment to the roots of one of our basic tenets: our alliance with the earth. This issue is called "The Tipping Point". It is a call to all of us to assert our talents and our conscience, to work to make a difference, while we may still have time.

Belva Ann Prycel, CONA Leadership Committee

What is a Tipping Point?

On my kitchen counter there's an old-fashioned scale I use to weigh ingredients for the pastries my Viennese mother used to make. On one side is the cast iron plate where I place the required little brass weights marked "25 gm", "50 gm", "100 gm". I fill the shallow bowl on the left with one spoon of sugar after another until the bowl drops with a little clunk. Too much sugar? No problem, I just put a few spoons of sugar back into the canister.

Malcolm Gladwell's book *The Tipping Point, How Little Things Can Make a Difference* (2000) introduced the concept of a "tipping point", the threshold moment when the pot boils over, where radical change is more than a possibility, when everything can change all at once. In these situations, once the scale has tipped, the balance can't be righted by simply putting the sugar back in the canister.

Gladwell applied this phenomenon to epidemics, but now "tipping point" is increasingly an expression of the alarming trends in the environment caused by human activity. The only disagreement centers over whether or not the crucial tipping point has already passed. In the Cold War era, John Foster Dulles introduced the term and the practice of "brinkmanship". That was risky, but at least it was intentional, calculated. Now it seems we are recklessly practicing unintentional brinkmanship with our home, the earth.

Doris Balant

"For all eternity, we are there in that primordial quantum soup, and for a few years, which is like nothing, the flicker of a firefly in the middle of the night, we're individuals. We identify with that flicker instead of the real home that we have. If we'd identify with our real home, I think we'd have a lot more love and compassion.

Our real home is the one body that encompasses all things. It is our unity and inseparability. The trees are our lungs, the earth is our body, the water is our circulation. They are not your environment, they are your boundless body. They are you! "

Gerry Shishin Wick

Internal Phosphorus Recycling: How a lake can reach the tipping point

An example of a tipping point can be observed right here in Maine, and has, in fact, occurred in some of our lakes. When internal phosphorus recycling occurs in a lake, the scale bangs down, the lake has gone over the tipping point.

Lake sediments generally contain an accumulated reservoir of the nutrient phosphorus in various organic and inorganic forms, which migrate more or less continuously from the lake bottom. As long as the water is rich in oxygen most of that phosphorus remains as a non-reactive, stable compound, and is not available to promote algae growth in the overlying water.

As algae mature and die they fall to the bottom of the lake, where they are eaten by bacteria which use up oxygen. When dissolved oxygen levels in the water fall below a critical threshold, a chemical change occurs, allowing biologically available phosphorus to migrate into the water. Generally this happens in the late summer or early fall when the surface water cools and sinks to the bottom, and phosphorus is brought up in water from the bottom rising to the surface. Taking thousands of years, this naturally occurring process, called eutrophication, is a lake's gradual aging and becoming more productive of algae.

Now humans, through various activities, have greatly accelerated this process in waters all over the world. Large amounts of plant nutrients brought into lakes and streams by runoff from roads, agricultural lands, lawns, golf courses and sewage are causing rapid algae growth.

In our area, Duckpuddle Pond in the Pemaquid Watershed, has already experienced large algae blooms and may be near its tipping point. While there are many complex factors involved in the development of eutrophication, the dramatic acceleration of this process is clearly caused by human activity. What we may see is a lake fouled by slimy algae, no longer aesthetically attractive or pleasant for recreation. What we don't see, is that most fish can no longer live in its anoxic waters and that the lake is forever damaged.

In many cases preventing or arresting pollution may still save a lake, but once internal recycling has started, no methods found to date have been able to reverse the process and to restore the lake to its former healthy self.

Information thanks to Peter Fischer, Former Chair, Pemaquid Watershed Association Water Quality Committee

Local, Sustainable Produce

Our farm, Morning Dew Farm, is situated on 26 acres along the Sheepscot River and cultivates 1½ acres of MOFGA-certified organic vegetables, fruits and herbs. Our farming methods are centered on a desire to create a vibrant ecosystem, one that starts with rich, living soil, and integrates cultural practices designed to protect the integrity and natural harmony of the land. The farm's proximity to Damariscotta markets allows us to harvest all of our produce at the peak of freshness and to make it available to our customers while still savory and nutritious.

We offer Community Supported Agriculture, an innovative form of farming and distribution that recasts the traditional economic and social aspects of agricultural systems. CSA members buy a share of a farm's produce in advance of the growing season and then receive a proportional delivery of produce, in season. Members value real food, full of flavor and vitality, and want to know and support family farms in their neighborhoods. Our greatest desire is to reconnect people to the fields where their food is grown. Living, working, and eating with the seasons are joys that we can all share. Gathering family and friends for a meal prepared with care is a time-honored tradition that can provide a space where we can indulge in the simple pleasures of taste and community.

Brady Hatch and Brendan McQuillan

Fisheries Experts Present View of a Hopeful Future by Kay Liss

(This is a reprint of an article published in the Lincoln County News)

I remember the days when it seemed most everyone was talking about “small is beautiful.” The catalyst was E.F. Schumacher’s 1973 book by that title and subtitled “Economics as if People Mattered.” There was so much excitement about this revolutionary concept in the midst of the obviously growing specter of the “military-industrial” complex. But what happened? The 80s and 90s with all the extravagant lifestyles fueled a hot stock market, globalization and huge companies like Wal-Mart spreading inexorably across the globe.

Perhaps it took going as far out of balance as we’ve gone in order to come back to the wisdom of “small is beautiful.” In agriculture, the idea seems to have caught on to some degree, with more sustainable community farms popping up around the country, and indeed, people around the world opposing takeovers of their land by multinational companies and demanding their rights.

In the fishing industry, the idea of trying to control the resource on a small scale in this country has been unheard of. All we hear is gloom and doom about the disappearing fish and the vast majority of fishermen losing their livelihoods.

Well, Ted Ames and his wife Robin Alden, both involved in fisheries issues for decades, are giving us some hope. As our CONA public forum speakers in March, the couple from Deer Isle presented an inspiring case for how failing fisheries can be turned around, using just this concept of small-scale management.

“Our only hope is for fishermen to take the reins... to become stewards” of the resource, Alden said. As a former head of Maine’s Dept. of Marine Resources, she knows from experience the “failure,” as she put it, of bureaucracies to control fisheries issues.

The system of fishery quotas to control species populations sets up a dynamic of “power” and “greed” and doesn’t address the fundamental problems of why the resource is depleting – from habitat loss and “overwhelming technology,” for example,

Alden suggested. “The conversation should be based on principles,” which can be implemented more easily in a smaller setting, she said, because humans “can’t operate well beyond a certain geography.” This kind of “community-based government” is being used successfully in third world countries in forestry and agriculture, she added.

Ames, a long-time fisherman and also a scientist, presented a slide presentation of his research into lost fisheries along the Northeast coast, work that won him a MacArthur Foundation award last year. As part of the fishing community, he was able to chart old fishing grounds, and what became clear was that cod and other fish spawn along the coastal shelf in the Gulf of Maine, within 20 miles of the coast, and this is where the fisheries have collapsed most dramatically.

Part of the problem is the huge and technologically overly-sophisticated fishing boats taking all of whatever is there, but it is also a destruction of habitat within this area, so that the fish are not spawning here anymore. The “tipping point” for most groundfish had occurred well before 1990 when the cod fishery collapsed, followed soon after by flounder. Ames, along with 30 percent of the fishing population, was forced to leave fishing. “Fishermen were on the edge of despair,” Ames said.



Ted Ames and Robin Alden speaking about the future of fisheries.

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Legendary Journalist to be Annual Meeting Speaker

The CONA board is thrilled to announce that Helen Thomas, legendary journalist and grande dame of the White House press corps, will be the speaker at CONA's annual meeting on Saturday, June 17 at the Barrows Barn at Round Top Center for the Arts in Damariscotta.

Her topic will be how the press has failed to challenge the present administration's activities and policies, especially regarding the war in Iraq. This is the subject of her fourth book, "Bashing the Press—Watchdogs of Democracy?", which will be coming out at the beginning of June and copies of which the author will be signing after the talk. Also on hand will be copies of an earlier autobiographical book, "Front Row at the White House."

In November 1960 Helen Thomas began covering then President-elect John F. Kennedy, following him to the White House in January 1961 as a member of the United Press International (UPI) wire service team. It was during this first White House assignment that Ms. Thomas began closing presidential press conferences with "Thank you, Mr. President." As UPI White House correspondent, she sat center front row in the White House briefing room asking hard questions through eight presidencies, until she resigned her post on May 17, 2000, a day after UPI was sold to News World Communications Inc., founded by the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, leader of the Unification Church. Ms. Thomas now works as a columnist for the newspaper publisher Hearst Corporation, but still retains her seat in the front row of the White House press briefing room. Her column is syndicated by the Hearst News Service, which serves 650 news outlets.

A popular speaker at events nationwide, Ms. Thomas has emerged as a vocal critic of President Bush. At a presidential news conference on March 20 of this year, the president took a question from Ms. Thomas, the first time he had done so in three years. "You'll be sorry, Mr. President," she warned him, as she asked "Why did you really want to go to war in Iraq?" Their exchange made front page news.

The talk will begin at 7 p.m., preceded by the annual CONA business meeting at 6. Tickets for the talk will be \$10, available at the Maine Coast Book Store, with any remaining tickets available at the door. Tickets will be limited to 240. Proceeds after expenses will go to the Community Housing Improvement Project, Inc. and Round Top Center for the Arts. There will be no potluck supper, but refreshments will be served after the talk.

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He then turned to lobster fishing. Interestingly, the lobster industry has become a model of stewardship in the Gulf of Maine, with lobstermen and scientists joining together in a "collaborative effort," as Alden remarked, to monitor the population and establish re-seeding programs. She and Ames have recently helped found the Penobscot East Resource Center, which provides support to local groups engaged in community-based fisheries, groups such as the Stonington Fisheries Alliance. Their hope is that such alliances will spread to other communities, bringing the "small is beautiful" idea from philosophy into reality. Indeed, it has become apparent it's not just a "beautiful" idea, but, as exemplified by the fisheries issue, an absolutely critical one as well.

CONA Mission Statement

CONA's mission is to provide opportunities to address the evolving problems of peace and social justice, locally and globally. Our programs include education, discussion, political action, and celebration to encourage the community to become active, involved citizens. We work in collaboration with other regional organizations, sharing concerns for pressing issues such as poverty, overpopulation, war, and environmental protection.

CONA History Part Three, 1997 to Spring 2004 by Julia Myers

Toward the end of 1997, Study Circles bloomed and expanded. The theme of "Simple Living" drew a large crowd, necessitating formation of several circles. We discussed many aspects, including over-consumption, population growth, how simple living impacts the causes of peace and justice in our society, the stressful effects of a complex society on the individual, and the spiritual dimensions in the search for simplicity.

The second year of Peaceful Beginnings, January 1, 1998, was celebrated at Round Top. Approximately 200 people attended, doubling the previous year's attendance. Also that year, Dr. Peter Wilk, psychiatrist and anti-nuclear weapons activist, delivered a talk entitled "Next Steps toward Abolition: De-Alerting and Ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty." As vice-president of the International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War, Dr. Wilk reminded us that the three last chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff had all endorsed the treaty and urged immediate passage by the U.S. Senate.

At our June 1998 annual meeting, a spirit-stirring speaker, educator and philosopher, William Strickland, told of his remarkable public high school in Pittsburgh. Located in a less-than-desirable neighborhood, this school, unlike others in the area, disavowed police guards with guns (vs. students with guns) and bars and locks on the windows and doors. Strickland showed slides of halls filled with paintings, sculptures and photography, orderly classrooms and students with happy faces. A high rate of graduates went on to institutions of higher learning.

At a CONA program that year Robert Marshall reported on Jonathan Schell's keynote speech at the Regional Conference on Nuclear Abolition in Portland, quoting Schell: "In our new circumstances what is needed is not just a moment of protest, but the steady engagement of citizens and their representatives over many years of constructive purpose." Are we following his recommendation?

Also at this time Enid Sharpe and Robert Marshall took their leave to pursue a new project, the Two-Echo co-housing community in Brunswick. Their contribution to CONA for 15 years was invaluable, and we miss them as friends as well as fellow-travelers.

The Study Circles continued to attract members and friends. In particular, the theme "Propaganda" drew many participants. As organizer Paul Kando explained, "People in Study Circles share views and topics of mutual interest in an enjoyable atmosphere of openness and mutual respect, honing their critical skills and challenging the temptation to accept simplistic mantras in place of real information."

Jim and Darcy Austin's boat "Pax" plied the Damariscotta River, giving passengers the opportunity to observe this beautiful natural resource and to encourage them to observe standards of non-consumption. Powered by soy oil, the "Pax" added emphasis to the consideration of environmental impact.

At a CONA meeting Paul Best addressed the mega-problem of health care, arguing for a universal single payer system. During his first term, President Bill Clinton made affordable health care a priority issue. David Broder of the *Washington Post* wrote: "You would think it would be an issue that every presidential candidate would address. Instead, what we hear is silence." Paul called on us to urge state and national legislators, party leaders and presidential candidates to give single-payer health care serious thought, a need that continues today.

In support of social issues, CONA organized a forum for Maine Speak Out, "Meeting Our Gay and Lesbian Neighbors." This "standing room only" meeting emphasized the need to accept each other as we are and to support a more tolerant society.

CONA offered an outstanding workshop, "Money and Our Lives," supported by a \$300 grant from Bath Savings Trust Co. Lu Bauer, CPA, led a large group of participants with the goal of empowering them to achieve a positive approach to their financial lives.

Professor George Caffertzis from the University of Southern Maine led a discussion on the abolition of the death penalty. While most Eastern European nations and some former republics of the Soviet Union had abolished capital punishment by 1989, the United States saw a large increase in executions in the 1990s, supported by politicians including George H. W. Bush and Clinton.

With Paul Kando at the helm, assisted by Steve Gorry, CONA's website, CONAMaine.com, was established. The site provides valuable information concerning current and future programs, membership, and matters for reflection.

Julie Zimmerman of Brunswick Friends Meeting, a graduate of Swarthmore College and author of five books, was the speaker for our 2000 annual meeting. In her talk she demonstrated her compassion for prisoners on Death Row and questioned the efficacy of our criminal justice system.

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At another program, co-founder of the Green Party, John Rensenbrink, spoke in favor of transforming America into the genuine democracy it was intended to be. He strongly favored a new politics based on a “power-with, as opposed to a power-over, model.”

A CONA workshop sponsored by United for a Fair Economy and titled, “The Growing Divide: Inequality and the Roots of Economic Insecurity,” gave us an insight into true economic justice. The group envisions a global society based on economic fairness, genuine equality of opportunity and economic justice. This is a timely call, considering that by the end of 1997, the wealthiest 1% of households had acquired more wealth than the bottom 95% combined.

In September 2001, following the 9-11 attacks, CONA president Tom Schmidt quoted poet Adrienne Rich in a fine letter to members: “My heart is moved by all I cannot save: so much has been destroyed. I have to cast my lot with those who age after age, perseveringly, with no extraordinary powers, reconstitute the world.” Schmidt urged us to focus on issues we could address locally and individually and to go on with the work we must do—and do well. Quoting in the same vein from Edward Myer’s book *Turnaround*, he explained, “This is your holy work, and it cannot wait. Make it big this time. Make it so.”

Also in 2001, a family involved in CONA made a generous donation to establish a Speakers Fund. This benevolence has allowed us to offer many fine programs.

A new Study Circle studied the timely book, *Ethics for a New Millenium*, by the Dalai Lama, in which he explores modern ethics in a secular value system and their role in modern society. Clearly this is highly recommended reading.

As part of the Speakers series, Professor Dana Sawyer from the Maine College of Art spoke on “American Culture in a Time of Stress.” An arresting speaker, he focused on some of our important cultural assumptions, and then challenged them all! Later that year, our great friend, supporter and former president, John Field, died in Fort Collins, Colorado, where he and Florence had moved a year earlier.

In the May 2002 *CONA News*, President Tom Schmidt wrote, “While what we do as members of CONA may seem ordinary to us, I can tell you that it seems extraordinary to others. All those friends that we visited (in the South) are liberal thinkers, yet they find it hard to believe that in Maine we live in a community of freedom and mutual respect.”

Belva Ann Prycel’s name began appearing in *CONA News* as a regular contributor, as well as in local newspapers. Her grasp of current issues and conflicts is expressed in clear, concise paragraphs.

The fall ’02 issue of *CONA News* carried a fine article by Paul Kando, inspired by Donald Rumsfeld’s now famous message about “Knowns, known unknowns, and unknown unknowns.” Belva Ann Prycel contributed a short article, “The Road to Liberty,” about the harsh realities after 9-11, the expansion of the USA Patriot Act to detain individuals indefinitely, and the increase of surveillance powers under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

Peaceful Beginnings, now a well-established, welcome annual event, hailed the 2003 New Year at Skidompha Library, a new venue. Poetry, puppets, arts and crafts, music, singing and dancing provided participatory entertainment for all ages. Many members and friends, good cooks all, provided an appealing array of edibles.

CONA members Reg and Sue Gagnon returned to Haiti for five months to serve as house parents for boys in Port-au-Prince. Their dedication to this project serves as a fine example of support for a poverty-stricken people. Another traveler was Suzanne Hedrick, who attended a protest in Georgia at the scurrilous School of the Americas. On her return she described how ten thousand protesters stood at the gates of the Fort Benning, Georgia, army base, bearing small wooden crosses with the names of victims of the school’s graduates.

Poet and essayist Paul Kando turned his talents to finding alternative films to show monthly at Skidompha Library. Subjects included U.S. history and foreign policy, life in Iraq, the Gulf War and the political situation in the Middle East, misdeeds of major corporations and the anatomy of a presidential election. Paul continues this mission with CONA’s deep gratitude.

“Impeachable Offenses” by Belva Prycel appeared in the *Lincoln County Weekly* in 2003. It is interesting to note that in March ’06 there again appears to be widespread interest in presidential impeachment.

Member Carol Brightman gave a program discussing her book, *Total Insecurity: The Myth of American Omnipotence*. In it she warned that U.S. actions were causing a rise of Iraqi nationalism and analyzed the U.S. abandonment of international treaties and security arrangements. Brightman argued cogently that it will take more than regime change in Washington to dispel the myth and illusions about unilateral American power.

To be continued.

A list of just a few of the many organizations that provide information about environmental issues:

Local:

Land conservation, education, water quality
Boothbay Region Land Trust. www.bbtl.org
Damariscotta Lake Watershed Association.
www.dlwa.org
Damariscotta River Association. www.dractl.org
Pemaquid Watershed Association.
www.pemaquidwatershed.org
Medomak Valley Land Trust.
www.medomakvalley.org
Sheepscot Valley Conservation Association.
www.sheepscot.org

Maine State:

Research, education, advocacy
Maine Audubon Society. www.maineaudubon.org
Maine Coast Heritage Trust. www.mcht.org
Natural Resources Council of Maine.
www.maineenvironment.org *
The Nature Conservancy. See www.Nature.org
for Maine chapter.

National:

Check out www.Envirolink.org for organizations
by topic

***NRCM is currently presenting a Maine Global Warming Challenge, listing steps each of us can take to reduce global warming.**

Members Corner

Carolyn Hardman:

I have been volunteering for Heifer International, a nonprofit organization that combats hunger and poverty around the world by giving communities farm animals and the skills they need to become self-sufficient. Two years ago when I was teaching social studies, I wanted to learn enough about globalization to create some good learning materials. After I retired from the public schools, I discovered Heifer's impressive educational program which not only educates students about global issues, but empowers them to make a difference. Heifer's Read to Feed program challenges students to raise money by getting pledges for a reading marathon. When they have raised enough to donate a goat, a water buffalo, or a flock of chicks, students have the satisfaction of knowing they have provided families with food and extra income so their children can go to school. My job is to spread the word to Maine teachers about the excellent free educational materials Heifer offers. This year, First Lady Karen Baldacci endorsed the Maine Read to Feed Challenge, and many schools have been participating. Check it out at heifer.org and readtofeed.org!

Belva Ann Prycel and Jennifer Litchfield are preparing for a two-woman show of their paintings at Round Top Center for the Arts next year. Belva Ann is nearing completion of her book, *Times and Tides*, an environmental memoir of life on the coast scheduled for publication in 2007.

Paul Kando is doing an occasional series of programs on energy for a post-oil world on local cable Channel 7, and will be teaching a course at the Senior College on "What now? — Our sustainable energy options" next fall. Course details and dates to be announced. kando@lincoln.midcoast.com.

Also a special thanks to the many CONA members who helped with the Wal-Mart issue.

CONA Board

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Helen Thomas

**Legendary Journalist
to speak at
CONA Annual Meeting
June 17th**

See details on page 4.



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