

# THE WEEKLY PACKET



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## MERI program turns local students into watershed investigators

BLUE HILL—Young science students have become active investigators of the Blue Hill watershed this fall as they participate in a new environmental education program recently begun by the Marine Environmental Research Institute in Blue Hill. The initiative, which aims to teach local students about natural processes and human activities affecting the watershed, offers hands-on learning about water quality, phytoplankton (red tide), point and non-point-source pollution, the land-sea connection, geomorphology, bacteria, macro invertebrates, lab equipment and mapping.

The new education program is multifaceted and designed to be held in the classroom, in the field and in the MERI labs. This fall MERI has begun working with seventh and eighth grade science classes from the Blue Hill Consolidated School on a six-week “investigative” monitoring program at the Mill Stream. MERI has involved high school students from Liberty School in two events: a marine debris cleanup on an island in Blue Hill Bay and a phytoplankton (red tide) workshop in the MERI research laboratories. MERI’s Education Department is currently designing watershed curricula for elementary, middle and high school science classes to complement the hands-on aspect of the program.

“Education is a very important aspect of MERI’s mission, as it brings young people closer to their watershed and to the sea into which it flows,” says MERI Executive Director Dr. Susan Shaw. “These students care about what they feel connected to and through this program we hope to strengthen that connection with our coastal environment.”

The new education initiative was born out of MERI’s ongoing monitoring programs in Blue Hill. For two years, MERI’s research

staff has been monitoring water quality, nutrients and bacteria at 17 marine and fresh water sites in the watershed. MERI has also been monitoring red tide at sites in Blue Hill and Brooklin in conjunction with the state’s Maine Coastal Program. A major goal of the new school program is to teach local students about human impacts on the watershed and to engage them in activities designed to protect it. For example, BHCS students will be stenciling storm drains, warning the public not to use them to dump toxic substances such as paint and oil.

MERI Education Director Martha Bell says, “Our students are natural stewards of the watershed and they are concerned about its future. MERI’s role is to offer them the tools to investigate and protect it.”

The Marine Environmental Research Institute is a nonprofit organization founded in 1990 to protect the marine environment and human health through research and education. For more information on this MERI school program and other educational activities, call Martha Bell at 374-2135, e-mail her at [mbell@meriresearch.org](mailto:mbell@meriresearch.org), or visit [www.meriresearch.org](http://www.meriresearch.org).