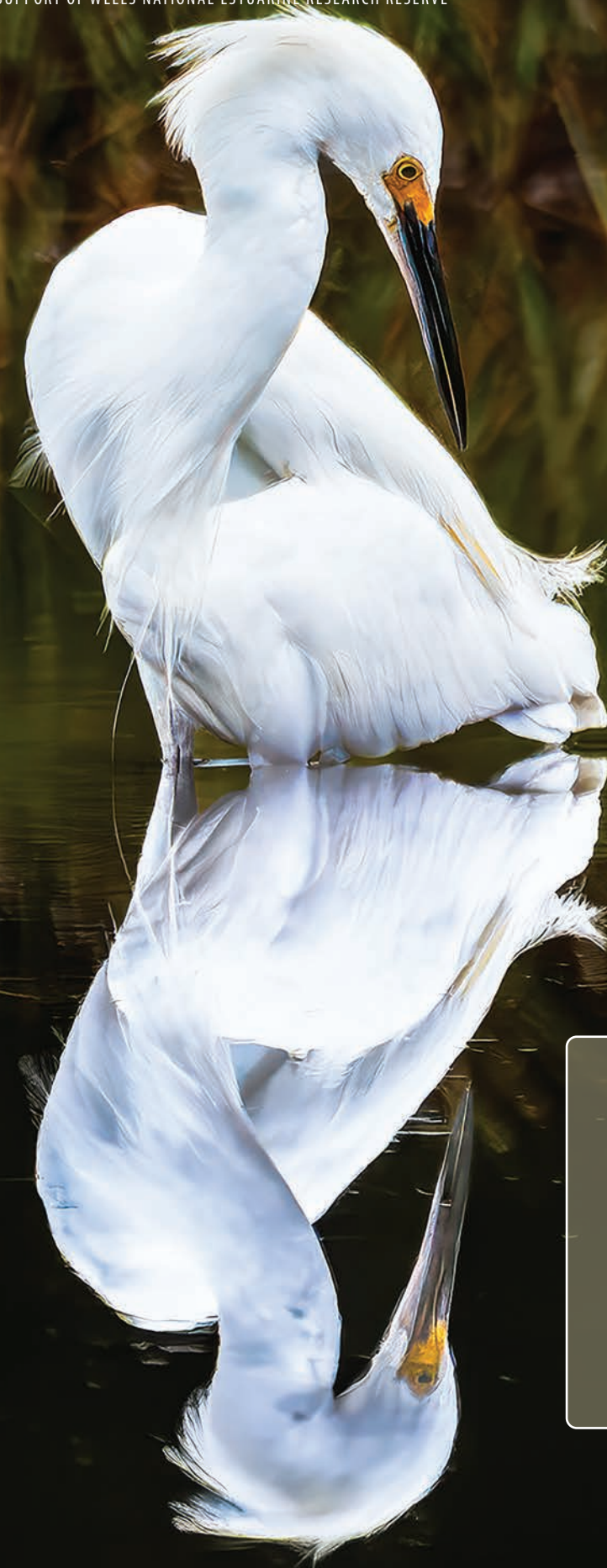


watermark

PUBLISHED BY LAUDHOLM TRUST IN SUPPORT OF WELLS NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE



SUMMER 2026

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Nik's Notebook

FOR EVERY SEASON, TERN, TERN, TERN

It's May in Maine and the trees are singing to me. Well actually, this morning, they're taunting me. Somewhere in the canopy above the Farley Trail here at the Wells Reserve at Laudholm, a blackpoll warbler is beaming out its *zing-zing-zings*. My Merlin app reveals that this "relatively large" warbler can, on its return migration south in the fall, "travel from the East Coast of the U.S. to South America in one nonstop flight!" [Emphasis Merlin's.] Incredible. I lift my binoculars and scan the exact spot where the sound is coming from. Invisible.

Ah, the fleeting high of migration season: winged beauties arrive in waves, are briefly findable before the leaves obscure all. After a long winter, these small travelers thrill birders with flashes of yellow, orange, blue, and black. When we spot them, that is. Paying attention is both a science and a form of devotion.

Easier to find this season are some of our more down-to-earth colleagues. This summer's Watermark is full of sightings. We are especially delighted to welcome Dr. Jennifer Seavey as the new executive director of the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve. Like the best birds on anyone's Life List, Jennifer brings range, resilience, and a keen understanding of landscapes ecological and cultural. Her arrival marks an exciting new season for this protected place dedicated to science, education, and conservation.

We also bid a fond and grateful farewell to Karen Stathoplos, who is retiring after 37 years of managing membership and bookkeeping for Laudholm Trust. For nearly four decades, Karen has helped keep our nonprofit organization's wings steady. She has been meticulous, loyal, largely out of sight but always vibrant with song and color. At this continually changing place, her constancy has made a difference. Karen is, and will remain, a rare bird indeed.



Nik Charov
President, Laudholm Trust
Chair, Wells Reserve Management Authority

COVER IMAGE: JACK COUGHLIN, "REFLECTED ELEGANCE"
ON VIEW IN "BIRDS OF A FEATHER" EXHIBITION STARTING
JULY 1 IN THE CEC GALLERY

your summer at the Wells Reserve

COASTAL ECOLOGY CENTER GALLERY

"Birds of a Feather"

July 1 – August 16

Opening Reception: July 7, 5-7pm



Photographs by Kevin Byron, Jack Coughlin, and Ken Janes covering the personalities, idiosyncrasies, and beauty of local birds.

"Intertwined: A Forest's Story"

August 19 – November 20

Opening Reception: August 20, 5-7pm



Painters Sherie Dowsett and Christine Andrews share their fantastic visual stroll through the flora and fauna of the Wells Reserve.

LAUDHOLM LIVE CONCERT

**Violinist Joanna Kurkowicz
and percussionist Matt Sharrock
Thursday, August 13, 7-9pm**

WEEKLY NATURE PROGRAMS

**Guided Kayak Tours: May–October
Bird Walks: Every other Saturday
May through August 8**

AND SO MUCH MORE! FOR COMPLETE LISTINGS VISIT: [WELLSRESERVE.ORG/CALENDAR](https://wellsreserve.org/calendar)

From the Middle Seat to the Captain's Chair

INTRODUCING DR. JENNIFER SEAVEY, NEW WELLS RESERVE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In January 2026, Dr. Jennifer Seavey joined the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve as its new executive director, succeeding Paul Dest, who retired after 25 years at the helm. Jennifer brings deep Maine family roots and more than two decades of leadership in marine science, conservation, and community-centered coastal resilience across the Gulf of Maine and beyond. She recently sat down to discuss her journey to the Wells Reserve at Laudholm.

"Though the Seaveys go back more than 300 years in the Seacoast region, I grew up in Massachusetts. We traveled a lot. I've been to almost every national park, because my parents would take these epic road trips with us three kids in the back of the car. (I was the youngest, so: middle seat!) My mother would be reading books to us about the park. She loved history and botany, she was really civically-minded, and she thought the national park system was the best thing – you know, 'the great American idea.' My dad, who was an optometrist, was really into science, and was a very avid photographer. I think he fancied himself Ansel Adams."

Jennifer's parents' interests influenced her desire to explore the western United States, leading her to attend Lewis & Clark College in Oregon. "When I was an undergrad, I was actually a political science major, with a biology minor, because I wanted to be an environmental lawyer. I knew the power of the law, and I thought, I will save the environment through law." But then a junior year semester in Australia, with a deep dive into forest ecology, changed her path. "I will never forget sitting in the rainforest with an ornithologist, in one spot, listening to the dawn chorus. It was a life-changing moment." Jennifer



returned to Lewis & Clark, started a bird banding club, and steeped herself in ornithology and "the ecological version of landscape ecology, which was developed in the Pacific Northwest, as opposed to the more European, architectural version of landscape ecology. It was such a rich field of study."

In further research for her Master's at the University of Washington and then a Ph.D. from UMass-Amherst, Jennifer focused on West Coast versus East Coast forest and then coastal ecological communities. "I had all these field experiences: Texas, Florida, Oregon, Washington, California, Massachusetts, Belize... I did bird banding, mostly." She wrote her dissertation on piping plovers and followed that up working with The Nature Conservancy to develop the first dynamic models of barrier beaches. That led her to Florida's Gulf Coast. "As soon as you get into sea level rise, you have to go to Florida... it's the best place in this country to look at that."

She landed in Cedar Key in the Big Bend region. Her experiences there transformed her understanding of community science engagement. Jennifer built trust with the locals "through, honestly, a lot of sitting on porches, sipping Wild Turkey." She soon found herself running the University of Florida's marine lab there. She saw how the local community's knowledge was essential to the research efforts and how residents were eager to have

“I am excited to join such an experienced team with a remarkable record of advancing coastal science, education, stewardship, and community collaboration. I look forward to working together with our partners to support the resilience of our coastal ecosystems and communities.”

scientists validate their long-standing observations. She worked closely with the watermen, not on birds, but on oyster reef restoration. “For six years of my PhD research on piping plovers, it was mostly adversarial. People were either ‘I hate plovers’ or ‘I love plovers.’ In Florida, I went from a very controversial species to oysters, which everyone wanted to know more about, and we were all on the same page.”

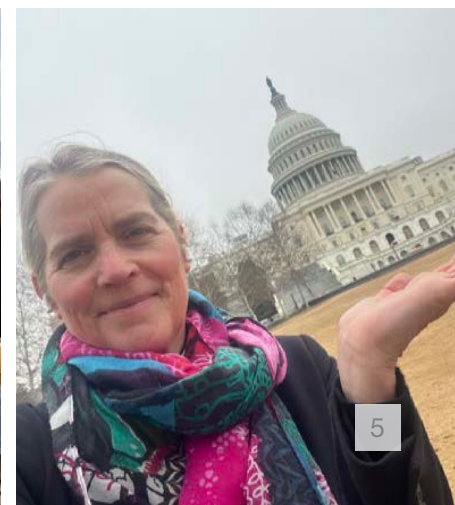
After a successful stint in Cedar Key, Jennifer returned to New England and spent nearly a decade as the executive director of the Shoals Marine Laboratory, the country’s largest undergraduate marine lab operated by Cornell University and University of New Hampshire on Appledore Island. There she grew the budget and staff, expanded student enrollment, increased research programs, modernized marine operations, and earned national recognition for advancing safety, experiential learning, and equity in field science. At Shoals, Jennifer taught and mentored dozens of students, strengthened connections between coastal communities and science, and co-founded regional initiatives such as the Northeast Coastal Stations Alliance.

Most recently, Jennifer served as Chief Programs Officer at the Island Institute, leading its Marine Economy & Climate and Community centers and strengthening the organization’s approach to climate adaptation, coastal

economic resilience, and community-driven solutions. With this wealth of experience, Jennifer has quickly come to understand the scope and possibilities of the Wells Reserve. “It’s amazing how comprehensive the Wells Reserve is: we can help communities with understanding the ecology of where they are, the resilience of where they are, what their options for how they might address their long-term sustainability. It’s just so holistic. Very few organizations have all of that expertise in-house. I love that.”

Jennifer has spent her career moving among field sites, island labs, coastal towns, and the people who know those places best. She brings that keen insight to the Wells Reserve, where the questions are local, the stakes are high, and the work, like a dawn chorus, is best understood by listening carefully. Preferably, from a perch on the porch.

“The importance of community has become more and more and more powerful and present in science. I’m very happy to be in a place that centers that.”





Research Takes the Plunge

DIVING DEEPER INTO EELGRASS DECLINE

On a gray day in May, the Wells Reserve's intrepid Research team headed out to sea to kick off their 2026 dive season. A mere 46 degrees outside, with the water temperature reading about the same, the seas were calm at least. At least there's no wind, everyone agreed. Research Director Dr. Jason Goldstein and Research Scientist Dr. Ben Gutzler are experienced divers, having completed hundreds of dives throughout their careers. For their Reserve research, these dives could involve a range of projects including setting up underwater experiments, placing water quality monitoring instruments, as well as collecting and studying lobsters and crabs in their natural habitats. The primary task for this first outing of the season was to begin installing equipment for a new project investigating the interplay between invasive green crabs and eelgrass beds in the Gulf of Maine.

ARE GREEN CRABS REALLY TO BLAME?

There's a prevailing idea that the increasing populations of invasive European green crabs (*Carcinus maenas*), are responsible for the rapid decline of eelgrass in the

Northwest Atlantic over the past several decades. That said, green crabs are incredibly ubiquitous and eelgrass beds have not all shown the same level of decline. While the Wells Reserve team agrees that green crabs have contributed to the problem, they suspect the full story is more complex.

WHY DOES EELGRASS MATTER?

Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) is a marine plant critical to coastal ecosystems. It supports commercial fisheries and plays an important role in resilience to climate change. This vital seagrass serves as habitat for young fish and provides food and refuge for a variety of other species. It also can help reduce shoreline erosion, improve water quality, and capture and store carbon. In Southern Maine, eelgrass has declined by ~75% since the early 2000s. Scientists are working to better understand and restore eelgrass habitats so they can continue providing these valuable ecological benefits.

SCIENCE AT WORK

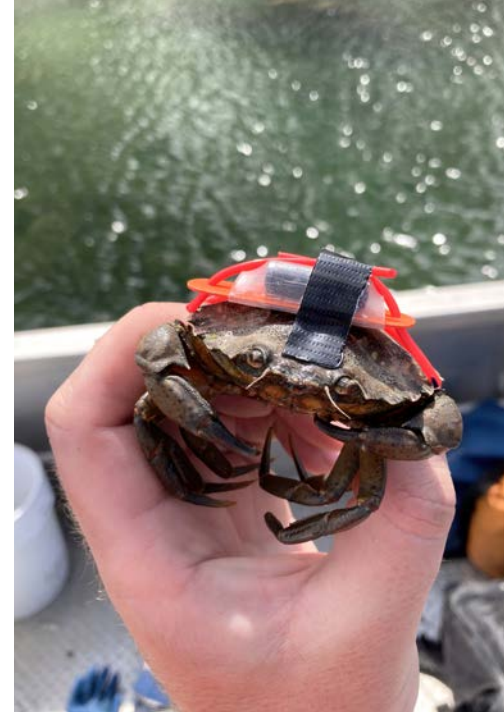
The Wells Reserve's Research team is partnering with Manomet Conservation Sciences and Casco Bay Estuary Partnership to study two different eelgrass beds: one in Kennebunk that is considered stable and healthy, and one in Casco Bay near Falmouth that has seen dramatic declines. The team will install acoustic receivers and tag green crabs in each location. Over the course of the summer they will collect data on the tagged crabs' movements and conduct monthly surveys of the crab populations and condition of the eelgrass itself. Are the crabs foraging? Seeking shelter? Spending all day in the eelgrass? Moving in and out? "Understanding how green crab activity and residency varies, or doesn't, between these beds will help us gauge the extent to which green crabs are influencing eelgrass resilience and hopefully give us a window into why the crabs are spending time in and around eelgrass," says Gutzler.

WHAT'S NEXT?

This project hopes to address a critical research gap that will help guide eelgrass restoration efforts. The results may help determine how much of the eelgrass decline can be attributed to green crabs and, based on these findings, inform where and how to approach eel grass restoration. These findings will help natural resource managers make decisions to enable long-term restoration of eelgrass beds and the important role they play in coastal conservation and resiliency.

"The knowledge gained from this work will greatly increase our ability to effectively address eelgrass declines. Healthy eelgrass beds are an integral part of healthy coastal ecosystems. Understanding how green crabs impact eelgrass will ensure that future eelgrass conservation and restoration work is guided by science, not assumptions." — Dr. Janelle Goeke, Staff Scientist, Casco Bay Estuary Partnership

This research is supported by the Maine Coastal and Marine Climate Fund.



We've Got a Training for That!

HOW TO THINK / TRUST / PLAN / LEAD
FOR A MORE RESILIENT MAINE



When visiting the Reserve, you can see Stewardship's work firsthand on the trails, encounter schoolchildren led by one of Education's docents, or stop by the gallery and peek into the Research lab. The work of the Reserve's Training & Engagement program (formerly the Coastal Training Program) is less immediately visible, but its effects extend far beyond the Reserve's boundaries. With a mission to bring together scientists, decision-makers, and local leaders to build resilience in Maine's coastal communities, Training & Engagement (TE) works with neighbors in our own backyard while also building partnerships, leading trainings, and providing resources up and down the coast.

Training & Engagement "is really where science and decision-making come together," explains Dr. Jessica Brunacini, TE Director. "We see this as a two-way relationship. We work to ensure that local, regional, and statewide leaders have access to and understand the most up-to-date science so that they can make evidence-based decisions. But



DR. JESSICA BRUNACINI (TE DIRECTOR) & LIV LENFESTEY (RESILIENCE TRAINING COORDINATOR) IN PITTSBURGH THIS MAY, WHERE THEY PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL ADAPTATION FORUM.

we also work to better understand the needs of decision-makers so that the science we conduct, the resources we develop, and the trainings we offer are responsive to those needs." The program, founded by Dr. Chris Feurt and developed under her leadership over the past 20 years, builds on decades of experience, with initiatives ranging from one-day workshops to multi-year, regional collaborations.

Recent TE Programs Have Included:

RETHINKING DECISION-MAKING: THE HALF-WRITTEN PLAY

In collaboration with Laudholm Trust, TE hosted the public debut of this theatrical exploration of community decision-making created by University of New Hampshire's PowerPLAY. A full house of 30 participants took a chance on this innovative program designed to offer an exploration into how communities can better collaborate to guide climate change adaptation policies.

"The Half-Written Play made me understand how complicated group dynamics and poor communication skills can affect local climate action. The actors were terrific and the design thinking activities got me excited to rethink how I engage with my own community!" — Workshop participant

IMPROVING DIALOGUE: CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS

This two-day in-person training offered guidance on engaging in difficult conversations for folks who work directly in or with communities to strengthen resilience. Sixteen participants gained skills for leading discussions when stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS: SOUTHERN MAINE RESILIENT COASTS

After nearly two years of research, the Reserve's Margaret A. Davidson Graduate Research Fellow, Graham Diedrich, hosted a workshop to explore how people from different professions think about coastal resilience and the role of scientific knowledge in decision-making. Diedrich, a Political Science and Public Policy Ph.D. student at the University of Michigan, designed the one-day gathering to identify opportunities for better collaboration between Wells Reserve staff and Southern Maine decision-makers such as state agency officials, educational leaders, land conservation professionals, and municipal staff. Participants left the workshop excited about new connections made and ideas to pursue.

STRENGTHENING INFRASTRUCTURE: CLIMATE READY KITTERY

This two-year project with Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission and the Piscataqua Region Estuaries

Partnership aims to plan for and address coastal flood risks at two important roadways in Kittery, Maine: Whipple Road (Route 103) near Gate 2 of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, and the Route 1 crossing at Spruce Creek. This collaborative effort brings together local, state, and federal partners to consider current and future flood risk at each site, taking a new, forward-thinking approach to long-range transportation and infrastructure planning that will help improve safety, maintain reliable access, and support surrounding coastal ecosystems in Kittery in the coming decades.

GETTING OUT OF HARM'S WAY: AN EMERGING NETWORK IN MAINE

TE is leading the charge to create a new learning and action-oriented network focused on "out of harm's way" strategies. These are approaches that (1) direct new development or redevelopment away from the most at-risk areas; (2) facilitate movement of people, property, infrastructure, and ecosystems away from increasing climate hazards; and (3) foster welcoming and safe receiving communities where resettlement occurs. The goal of this work is to make communities in Maine even better places to live for current and future residents, to facilitate public access to coastal places, to support the restoration of damaged ecosystems, and to promote strategies that address the disproportionate burdens of climate risks and hazards.

INTRODUCING THE RESILIENCE TRAINING ACADEMY

This new initiative will expand the reach of TE's work to communities across Maine's coast. Supported by \$550,000 from the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, this multi-year project is a part of Resilience Maine, the state's climate change action plan.

Designed in response to challenges identified by resilience leaders, community members, and state agency staff, the RTA will offer workshops, trainings, and knowledge exchange opportunities that build practical skills, strengthen partnerships, and address critical gaps in the field. Interviews and analysis conducted by TE over the past year revealed several common needs that will guide the offerings:

- ✓ **Best practices for decision-making in uncertain times**
- ✓ **Understanding civic and governmental processes such as legislation, zoning, and land use planning**
- ✓ **Funding, financing, and communicating economic impact**
- ✓ **"Soft Skills" such as community engagement, communication, and trust**
- ✓ **Mentorship and training for various career levels**
- ✓ **Cross-disciplinary collaboration**





A Fond Tra-La and Farewell to a Unique Warbler

In 1989, Laudholm Trust's first president Mort Mather realized he needed a bookkeeper to track the fledgling nonprofit's donations and expenses. Mort being Mort, he reasoned that math ability would be most important for the job, and so he turned to his teenaged son's English and math tutor, Karen Stathoplos. Karen gleefully accepted, provided she could continue her singing and dancing hobbies. As she prepares to retire this month after 37 years of overseeing the Trust's finances and membership program, she's "pleased as punch" and looking forward to even more singing and "scrumptious dinners with her patient husband."

Karen has worked for six Trust presidents, seen a vastly altered Laudholm campus, tracked a quadrupling of the organization's budget. Along the way, she's acquired lifelong friends among multiple generations of staff,

volunteers, and members. Her birthday celebrations, Twelfth Night cleansings, Parisian jaunts, and afternoon teatimes are rituals here, not to be forgotten.

A poetry lover, Karen takes a particular and peculiar delight in language (both English and French). Letters are not mailed out, they are "whisked"; computer glitches are "most irksome," and at their worst, "misery-bother." Successful monthly bank statement reconciliations still earn "huzzahs," even "joy supreme!" We've all picked up these Stathoplisms; our conversations are more colorful thanks to her.

Karen's warbling, her Renaissance dresses, her tales of martinis and Laudholm hijinks from "the mists of time" – the Wells Reserve has been enriched and enlivened by her decades here.

"My mom, Georgie Fisher, loved the natural environment, the mission of the Reserve, was very proud of her Volunteer Extraordinaire award, and made other friends there too. But the bond she developed with Karen was world-changing." — Elizabeth Fisher



flotsam

PEOPLE

This January, we welcomed a new member to the Laudholm Trust team.

Jamie Lombardi, already a regular research volunteer, has taken on a new role as Fundraising Coordinator, assisting with grant writing, fundraising, event programming, and will take on all things membership as Karen retires. She will still be tracking blue crabs in the marsh, fear not!

In April, we said farewell to Seasonal Field Technician **Jamie Hollander** who worked with the Stewardship and Training & Engagement teams throughout the summer and winter seasons. She's off to grad school in British Columbia, where she will study Indigenous practices in freshwater ecology. She cites her experience at the Reserve exploring the intersection of science and community outreach as integral to helping her define her future grad school and career pursuits.

PLACES

In mid-March, we officially **broke ground on the Goodwin Marsh restoration project** on Drakes Island. New channels will improve the flow of water in the marsh, helping to rebuild lost elevation, increase vegetation and wildlife habitat, and enhance the marsh's ability to protect the land from flooding and erosion.



PROGRAMS

This season, **875 lucky students** visited the Reserve for hands-on learning experiences in the estuary. And on Earth Day, **324 nature enthusiasts** of all ages had the unique opportunity to step inside a life-size inflatable whale in Mather Auditorium!

The Education team was selected to be part of a UC Berkeley project exploring how to incorporate a **new set of ABCs: Awe, Belonging, and Contemplation** into their programming through inclusive storytelling and community partnership. The researchers will join the team in June to work on integrating these concepts into kayaking programs, Teachers on the Estuary and the Portland High School camp. We look forward to sharing what they discover.



wellsreserve
at laudholm
Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve

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The Wells National Estuarine
Research Reserve is one of
30 reserve sites throughout
the country. All reserves



require local funding to match federal grants from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The Wells Reserve is the only reserve that receives its match from a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Each year, Laudholm Trust contributes private funds and in-kind services to support Wells Reserve operations and capital improvements.



38th laudholm
**nature crafts
festival**

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAY ARBELO

September 12-13, 2026
the weekend after Labor Day!

find details at wellsreserve.org/crafts