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## The story of PWA's origins

The following article, adapted from "A Look Back to PWA's Beginnings" by Elsa Hauschka, was originally printed in *The Watershed Watch*, Winter 1992.

“What are all those yellow ribbons?” Ted Hauschka wondered on Saturday, August 6, 1966. As he canoed along Biscay Pond’s western shore, from the fern-covered cliffs near the Damariscotta town line all the way to the outlet and downstream to the bridge, the long Bristol shoreline—over a mile—was marked at 50-foot intervals by yellow-flagged stakes. Was the entire wooded land from the two old Weeks farms to be subdivided?

An advertisement had recently appeared in the local newspaper: “Grand Opening—Boyd’s Lake Shores—Lake Lots \$25. down.” Sunday, the Hauschka’s went to Boyd Pond where an eager salesman waited in his Toronado. He boasted that several hundred lots were going to be sold at Biscay, offered by the same developer. “You won’t recognize it—it’ll be like a city!” The plan for Biscay showed 50’ x 90’ x 100’-deep lots lining the shore, with similar lots ranked row upon row up the slope to Lessner Road—no water supply or sewage system for the “city”, and one common lot as a “marina” for 100 boats.

Having been told by the Selectman that there were no zoning regulations in place and the Town attorney assuring that “under current State Plumbing Code there would be no sewage disposal problems”, the developers were under the impression that their subdivision project would meet no obstacles. “Biscay Lake Shores” promotion seemed imminent; fast action was needed before the first lots were sold.

As a biologist, Ted Hauschka saw immediately how such a crowded settlement with individual septic systems—one above the other on steep terrain or swampy areas—would destroy Biscay’s water quality and endanger the health of all. Many existing cottages drew their water from the pond. All summer, Bob Reny’s beach thronged with swimmers: over 300 children were enrolled in DARA (former name of the CLC YMCA) Red Cross swim classes. Biscay was at high risk.

About 20 families on the pond were contacted and told about the size and type of development planned and the serious pollution threat. All were concerned and agreed to form an organization for group pressure on the Selectman. Many people outside Biscay helped with advice including George Birkett who offered the Hauschka’s the benefit of his experience in starting the Damariscotta Lake Association, giving them a copy of their By-Laws to use. “Incorporation is essential,” he said.

A meeting in Augusta with Raeburn McDonald, Chief of the Water Improvement Commission (the DEP’s predecessor), proved to be most helpful as, upon hearing the imminent threat to Biscay, took Vol. 14 of Maine Revised Statutes from the shelf, opened it to page 694 and said “Here is your answer.” Section 4956 empowered a municipality to regulate

land subdivision of three or more lots, to approve or reject the plan, and to prevent registering the plan or any deed conveyed until approved.

On Sunday, August 14, many Biscay Pond homeowners and others met at the Hauschka’s. Robert Merriam said that DARA could not continue the swimming instruction if the water became polluted and the area made unsafe by numerous new powerboats. It was voted to form an association then and there. Proposed By-laws adapted from the Damariscotta Lake’s, were discussed and accepted. Four officers and directors—two from each town having land on Biscay—were elected.

Monday afternoon, August 15—just nine days after the yellow flags were sighted—the non-profit Biscay Pond Association was duly incorporated in Judge Arthur Nissen’s office. Nissen (offering his services pro-bono) had a legal injunction readied, preventing sale of any 50’ lot until the Selectman used their review powers. The developer’s lawyer in Massachusetts was informed of this, of the State statute and that there would be serious problems if objections were not ironed out. Nissen arranged a meeting of all parties concerned.

Thursday, August 25, there was a meeting in the First National Bank. State Sen. Margaret Sproul present, the three Bristol Selectmen, Bob Reny, Dick Bryant and Kendall Longe, for the new Association and two State water quality officials were there. The chief salesman for the developers greeted them with: “No problem—we’ll be in and out in two years”, and their attorney complained of the money already spent on “doing things right.” “You people haven’t done your homework,” Longe retorted, and the three Massachusetts men were subjected to a crash course in soils, terrain and septic systems by the men from Augusta. Developing one lot is different from developing a whole bunch of lots, they learned.

Three days later, with the injunction still pending, the developers met again with town and state officials and agreed to double the shoreline length and the square footage of all lots and to include several restrictions on sales agreements and deeds. A number of these larger lots were sold, but the lake-side “city” envisioned by the developer never came into being. The same day, Sunday, August 28, 1966, the first annual meeting of the Biscay Pond Association took place in the Damariscotta Municipal Building. “To preserve, protect and enhance the beauty of Biscay Pond and its adjacent area and to guard its waters against pollution” was its purpose. In 1973, members voted to enlarge the scope and to change the name of the association to reflect concern for the entire Pemaquid watershed, of which Biscay is a segment.

Elsa Hauschka, Secretary of the BPA, 1966–1976

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