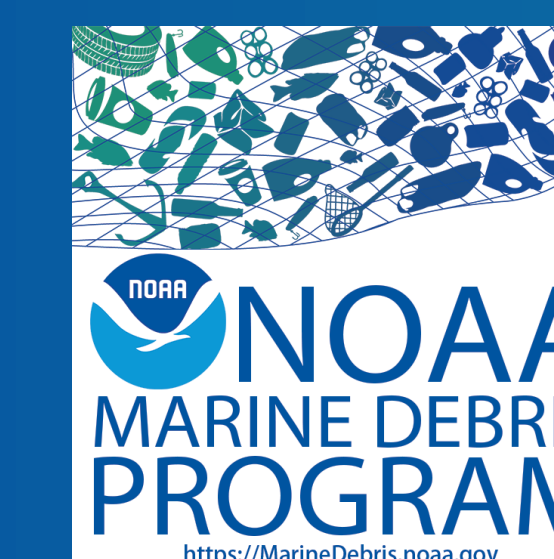


ReuseME: A Pilot Study to Explore Opportunities to Reduce Marine Debris and Municipal Costs with Reusable Food Packaging Systems

Catherine Segada, William Brenneman, Gianna DeJoy, Chyanne Yoder, Ryan Kennedy, Alejandro Fernández Snell, and Cindy Isenhour

University of Maine, NOAA Marine Debris Program



Problem Statement

Environmental

- ~4.9 million tons of waste from disposable food serviceware (Product Stewardship Institute, 2024)
- ~100,000 marine animals die annually due to plastic debris (Product Stewardship Institute, 2024)
- Single-use packaging, regardless of material, does not reduce waste
- Ultimate problem is **DISPOSABILITY**

Economic

- U.S. food service providers spend \$24 billion each year purchasing ~one trillion pieces of disposable packaging (Upstream, n.d.)
- Coastal communities burdened by significant waste management costs during tourist season



Disposable plastic cup littering a pedestrian crosswalk, Bar Harbor, ME



Multi-layering disposable packaging found in Bath, ME



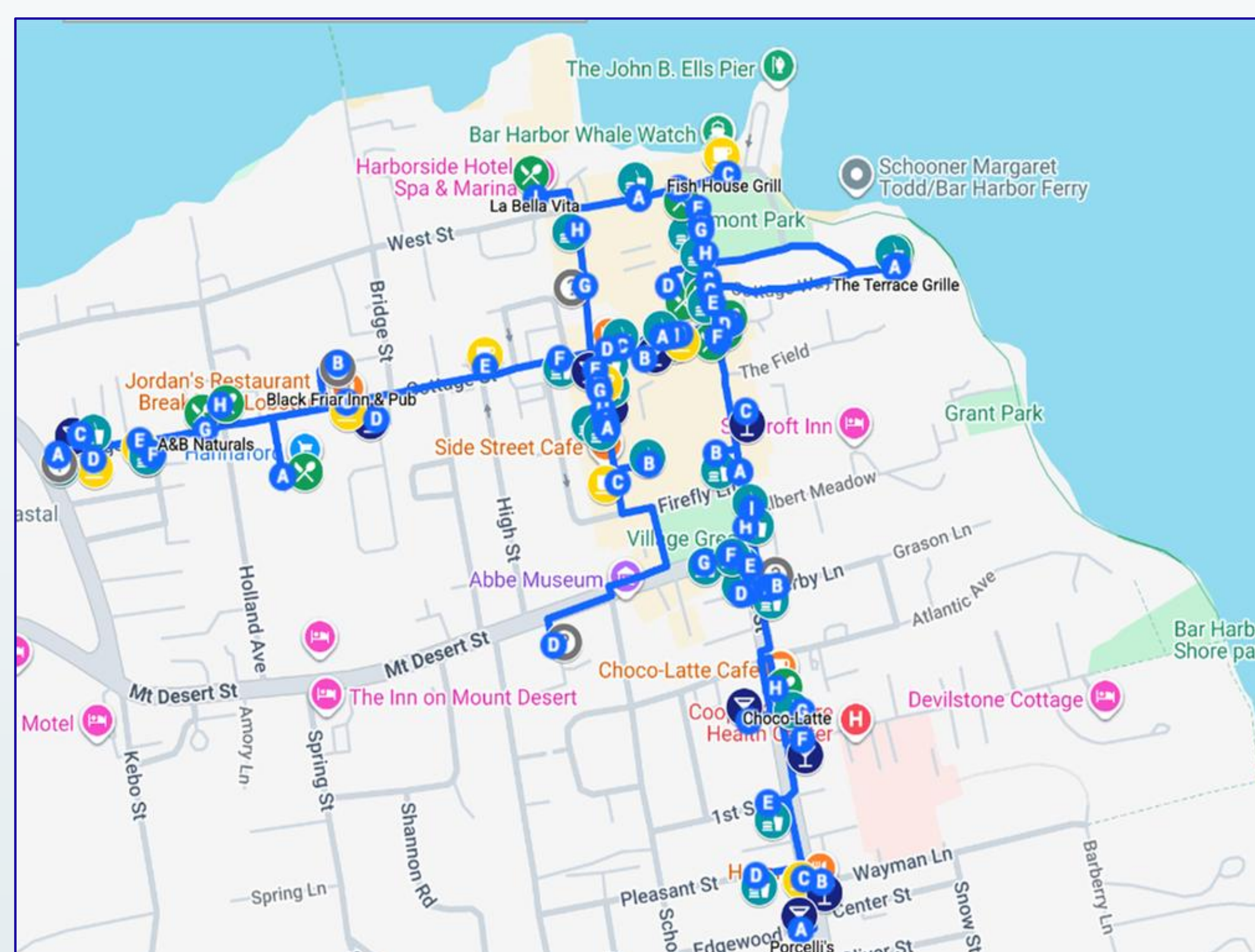
Single-use plastics found on Willard Beach in South Portland

References

Forever Ware. (2022). Why Forever Ware? [image] <https://foreverware.org/merchant>
 Product Stewardship Institute. (2024). *Supporting Reusable Food Serviceware in Your Community*. <https://productstewardship.us/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Municipal-Guide-Final.pdf>
 Upstream. (n.d.). *Reusable foodware saves businesses money*. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f218f6771fdb38f06cecbcb/t/62840d547c3e1756f0b7bcae/1652821335412/Reuse+Saves+Money+Factsheet_FINAL.pdf

Research Questions

- What reusable food packaging systems work best in Maine's unique coastal communities?
- How can Maine communities develop reusable food systems that are competitive with the convenience of disposable, single use food packaging?



Map of food service providers demonstrating high density in downtown Bar Harbor

Methodology to Date



Pilot Communities: Bar Harbor, Bath, South Portland

- Chosen by
 - Location
 - Seasonal variability
 - Municipal-level waste reduction priority

Food Packaging Survey: Mixed-methods ethnographic fieldwork

- Gathered food service providers' experiences with food packaging, current levels of disposable packaging use, perspectives on desirable/undesirable trait of packaging, and assess their level of interest in alternative packaging systems

Food Packaging Survey Results

- \$881 spent on disposables** for the average business each month
- The 54 participating businesses used, on average, **2,420 disposable** units each month
- Businesses spent on average **\$259 per month managing waste** (garbage, recycling, composting)
- Health and safety** is a top priority in making packaging decisions



Example of stainless steel reusables with silicone lids from Forever Ware (Forever Ware, 2022)

What is to come...



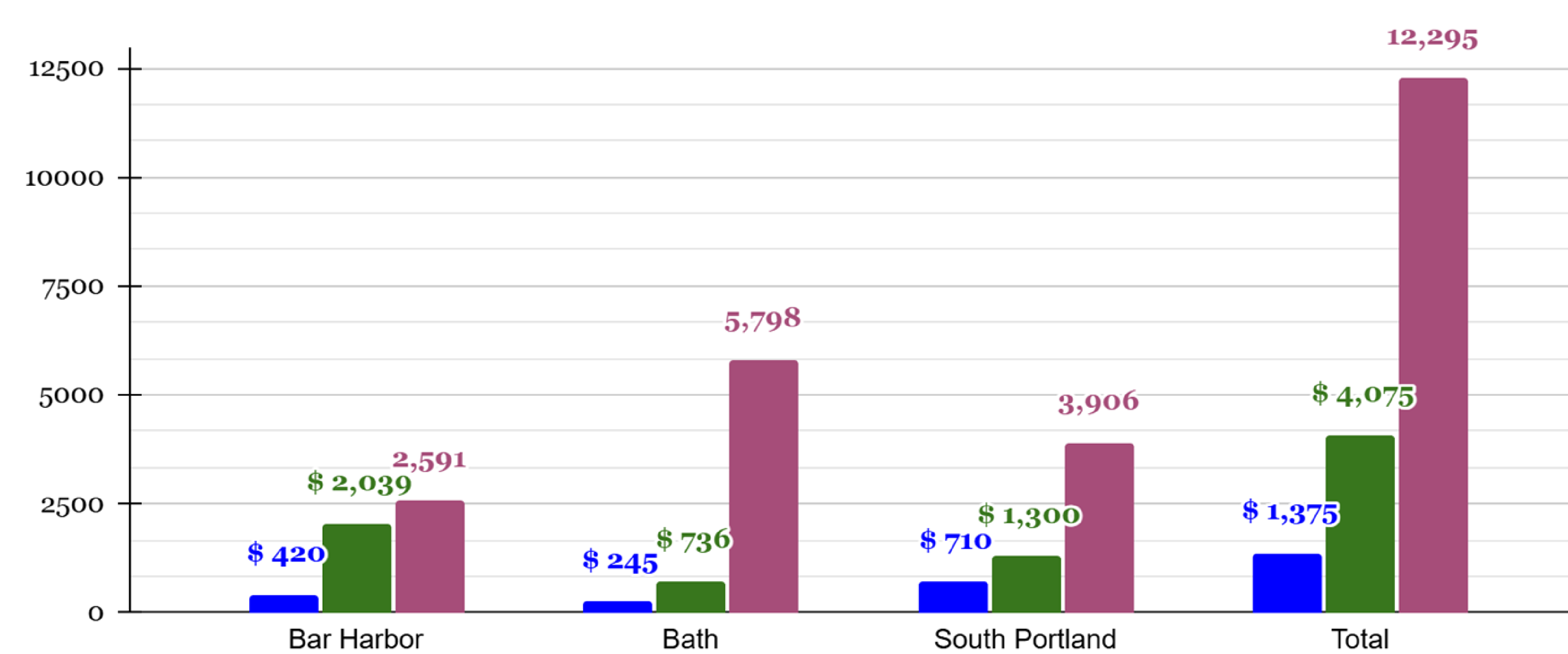
Logo for the ReuseME pilot project

ReuseME Pilot Project:

- Roughly nine restaurants participating over the course of nine months
- Adding in reusables, not entirely replacing disposables
- Monthly interviews and data collection
- Creating a data decision tool that will be dispersed to Maine communities

Food Packaging Survey Results

■ Waste Management Fees (garbage, recycling, composting) \$/month
 ■ Packaging Procurement \$/month ■ Waste Generation units/month



Participating Communities