
Appendix J Draft 2005 Harbor Management Plan –Overview Statement

**NATURAL RESOURCES ADVISORY BOARD
TOWN OF WELLFLEET**

Draft 2005 Harbor Management Plan - Overview Statement

7/11/2005

OVERVIEW and BACKGROUND

The state of Wellfleet Harbor has been generally sound, despite the two recent shocks of QPX and Red Tide. There exists a balance amongst the many users of the harbor – the species who live there, boaters, shell and fin-fishers, lovers of nature, and those who enjoy simply the beauty of the harbor.

The sound state of the harbor is the result of many factors, both human and natural. There are many groups throughout the Town who consider themselves as custodians of the harbor and seek to protect it. Many useful actions have been taken since the last HMP was issued in 1995:

- Regulatory steps have been taken to protect the ACEC designation of the harbor, such as wetlands restrictions and reduction of coliform contamination (septic upgrades, a marina pump out program, installation of catchment basins near the harbor, control of animals on beaches). These must continue.
- The Town of Wellfleet, through the Coastal and Pond Access Committee, is taking active steps to protect citizen access to the water, both ways to the water and beach facilities. We support this initiative.
- There have been significant conservation purchases adjacent to the harbor, by the Town through the Open Space Committee, the Wellfleet Conservation Trust, and Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, Mass Audubon Society.
- The harbor is also favored by its natural features: an open harbor with a ten-foot flushing tide.

However, there are signals of concern, in addition to QPX and Red Tide:

- The last twenty-five years has seen explosive growth in the Town population, summer visitors, boaters, shellfish grants, etc. All of these lead to a more intensive use of the harbor. Closures of shellfish areas downstream of the Herring River dike are on-going.
- Fishermen report an increase in seaweeds and algal blooms in the harbor.
- Duck Creek, and the Marina, show a build-up of sediments and high nitrate and chlorophyll levels.

- Revetments and the armoring of the shoreline have gone from practically none to nearly 100% along Mayo Beach, Nauhaught Heights, south Indian Neck and west Lt Island.
- Eelgrass once existed in Wellfleet Harbor; it is not now present.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

During the course of our harbor management review, we decided that there were several large themes we could all agree to:

- Water quality- maintaining good water quality is critical to all uses of the harbor.
- Ensuring multiple, traditional uses of the harbor, with opportunities for local employment.
- Maintaining the biological diversity of the harbor, with its many habitats and species.
- Longer term perspective. Policies and actions should withstand the test of time. Therefore, we have favored wherever possible, the use of natural processes to keep a productive, healthy harbor.

KEY ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

- Salt marshes are the critical biological drivers for harbor productivity. Tidal restrictions, especially at the Herring River, should be removed as part of a total plan to protect our salt marshes.
- A plan is needed for remediating the inner harbor watersheds - Duck Creek and Chipmans Cove – by opening Mayo Creek and the old railroad dike, by use of shellfish and, possibly, by land based nitrogen removal technologies. A similar plan may also be needed for Blackfish Creek.
- We are woefully lacking of data to support management steps - water quality, finfish populations, salt marsh health, bottom types are examples. When the harbor was uncrowded, these details were not needed - they are now.
- The Marina is a key center of Town life and an economic driver for the Town. A long-range plan is needed to guide development of the Marina without affecting the balance of uses in the harbor.
- Shoreline development and armoring has limited ways to the water and beach uses guaranteed since colonial times. Traditional neighborhood access is fast disappearing. We must act to rebuild those rights.

- Systems to insure that pollution does not enter Harbor (buffer zones, catchments, open space, septic design, and education programs).
- We must act to ensure productive and sustainable use of all shellfish areas. The Shellfish Constable office should be strengthened with additional regulatory authority in emergencies.
- Natural resource sanctuaries - Chipman's, Fox Island, east Blackfish Creek, Loagy Bay and the Run should be formally recognized and protected. Fortunately, conservation organizations have already taken the lead in these areas.

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