

Cleaning some embayments could be a natural

Helping nature help itself will lessen costs

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Dr. Brian Howes says that Popponesset Bay, bordered by Cotuit's western shore, is one of the most nutrient-loaded embayments in all of Southeastern Massachusetts and the message coming from the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth study he heads is that it can be saved. The good news for Barnstable is that many of its troubled embayments are similar systems.

The study is part of the state Estuaries Program, a concerted effort to document the nutrient loading problem of coastal embayments with an eye toward practical solutions.

Howes said that more nutrient reduction than originally thought could be accomplished through the restoration and creation of freshwater wetlands in the upper reaches.

That's good news for the lower watershed,

Cleaning embayments...

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which includes the heavily populated shorefront areas, because the man-made solutions can be that much smaller and less expensive.

The 150-page technical report provides the scientific basis for this conclusion and will be the subject of two public hearings next week. Howes said that while the text of the study is dense, the presentation is not.

Much of the baseline information from the study was gathered through a citizen water quality sampling program. In Barnstable, that ef-

fort is coordinated by John Jacobson, who organizes sampling for Popponeset Bay and the other embayments that will be the subject of future studies.

The release of this report will initiate the Barnstable Nutrient Management planning process for the Popponeset Bay watershed. The meeting for Barnstable is scheduled for Wednesday at 7 p.m. in the main hearing room of town hall.

The report, "Linked Watershed-Embayment Model to Determine Critical Nitrogen Loading Thresholds for Popponeset Bay," will be posted on the town Web site, www.town.barnstable.ma.us.