

Cape Cod stewards

CC Times

■ Who's responsible for protecting the Cape's environment? You.

When the Cape Cod Times invited readers, over the past six weeks, to sound off on four major issues facing the Cape in 2006, including affordable housing and school funding, nothing opened the floodgates to such passionate response as much as "the environment."

Most of the responses are printed in this section, and we were thoroughly impressed by our readers' depth of knowledge about the Cape's environmental challenges.

It should have come as no surprise, considering that every one of the Cape's 15 towns overwhelmingly approved the Cape Cod Land Bank in 1998. A recent Cape Cod Times readership survey also revealed that "environmental issues" were the No. 1 topic that interests our readers.

The common theme running among most of the responses is that each one of us is responsible for our environment. This is not one



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of those issues that can be laid at the doorstep of a legislator or a town planner. Each Cape Codder is directly responsible for preserving the Cape's sense of place, its beauty, its natural wonder.

As Gordon Peabody of Wellfleet says: "Today's greatest challenge to Cape Cod's natural resources may be ourselves, the consumers. Tomorrow's greatest challenge...may be transforming our role as consumers, from one of entitlement to that of stakeholders."

So how can we all become stakeholders in protecting our environment?

Here are some suggestions from you, our readers:

■ Join a local environmental group. "There are so many dedicated small groups of volunteers, on town boards and nonprofits, but they are all always looking for more members and new ideas and energy," said Mark Robinson of the Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts Inc.

■ Attend meetings, and ask questions. Pay particular attention to the new Barnstable County Wastewater Collaborative, where each Cape town is being asked to serve and participate in helping each other to solve costly sewerage initiatives. (George Hampson, North Falmouth)

After all, the lack of wastewater management represents one of the greatest threats facing the Cape today.

Nitrogen from septic systems is entering our freshwater ponds, coastal bays and estuaries. This leads to eutrophication, or the "over fertilization" of an aquatic system, which degrades water quality.

■ **Return a small percentage of your property to natural vegetation, which will use less water, fertilizer and pesticide. (Peabody)**

■ **Avoid use of chemical lawn fertilizers, use phosphorus-free products, such as detergents and dishwasher soaps, and support wastewater treatment in our towns. (Judy Dandison, Yarmouthport)**

■ **Lawns within 300 feet of ponds and streams should be eliminated and banned. Surface water from streets and roofs should be fed to underground leaching pits with a setback of more than 50 feet.**

A 50-foot minimum band of Cape Cod natural vegetated growth should be required at the boundaries of ponds and streams. (Carroll Johnson, Brewster)

■ Use less water with flow-restricting

shower heads. If you are in the market for a washing machine, buy a front load machine – they use only about half the water of top loaders, and save energy with much more efficient spin dry cycles. (Ted Theis, Mashpee)

■ If you have a dish washer, only run it when full. (Theis)

■ No more than three toilets per household; regular (each time) toilet flushing only for solid waste; for liquid waste, flushing at the most every three or four usages. (Jean Ludtke, Barnstable)

■ Lobby elected officials for stricter enforcement of the Clean Air Act, which sets emission standards for fossil fuel power plants. The Mirant power plant on the Cape Cod Canal in Sandwich is one of the “filthy five” polluting power plants in the state. (Dandison)

■ Mandatory recycling with collection at the curb. (Richard Fellenberg, Mashpee)

■ Encourage development of medium-price “cluster” housing. Consider...inland housing complexes with attendant wastewater treatment facilities. (John Kiley, Osterville)

■ Encourage conservation of energy in homes, lighting, transportation, and business. (Kiley)

These are all ways to become stakeholders in protecting the Cape’s environment.