

Protect air, water and land

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We need to be equally concerned about the state of all three elements of the Cape Cod environment: air, water, and land.

Air quality: According to Cape Clean Air, the Mirant power plant on the Cape Cod Canal in Sandwich is one of the "filthy five" of the most polluting power plants in the state. Barnstable County has been reported to have the worst air quality of any county in Massachusetts by the American Lung Association for several years in a row. Causes include the inefficiency and age of the power plant, pollution arriving from the smokestacks of the Midwest, automobile and truck exhaust, which is especially bad during the summer months, and the natural flow of the wind currents in our area, which keep bad air funneled over the Cape instead of blowing out to sea.

Solutions: Support the offshore wind farm project on Nantucket Sound as a source of clean alternative energy, lobby elected officials for stricter support of the Clean Air Act, which sets emission standards for fossil fuel power plants.

Water quality: Our Cape Cod freshwater ponds are affected by phosphorus loading as evidenced by lack of water clarity, algae blooms, and fish kills. Our marine waters (bays and estuaries) are affected by nitrogen loading, resulting in eutrophication that draws oxygen away from native plants and animals and makes the water less than desirable for recreational use. Title 5 septic systems have proved ineffective in combating these problems.

Solutions: Avoid use of chemical lawn fertilizers, use phosphorus-free products (detergents and dishwasher soaps), and support wastewater treatment (sewers) in our towns. The latter will be very costly, but will eventually be needed.

Land: A map published by the Woods Hole Research Center comparing the amount of open, undeveloped land on Cape Cod in 1951 to the amount of open, undeveloped land in 1990 shows a startling increase in the color yellow, which represents the developed land. The pervasiveness of the color yellow, were the map updated in 2006, would surely be much greater. We have moved from being an essentially rural area to an essentially suburban area in the space of 60 years. This has placed a burden on all of our resources, most especially our groundwater.

Solutions: Place more stringent controls on zoning and development, support efforts to conserve open land in our towns.

All citizens need to become aware of the facts, what it will take to solve the problems, and what we can do as individuals. We need to be more aggressive – not less – in conserving our Cape Cod natural resources.

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