

Consumers must become stakeholders

Today's greatest challenge to Cape Cod's natural resources may be ourselves, the consumers. Tomorrow's greatest challenge to our natural resources may be transforming our role as consumers, from one of entitlement to that of stakeholders. Our country's cultural concept of limitless natural resources has run out of steam on the sands of Cape Cod.

On Cape Cod, we are beginning to understand how people and resources may need each other to survive. Open-ended management plans disrespect sustainability, creating illusions of limitless resources. Our past resource relationships may have had the best of intentions but lacked understanding and were doomed to fail like a marriage on a blind date.

We can't protect the resources that will play a critical role in the future quality of life on Cape Cod without a change in our perspective. Maybe it's easier for us on Cape Cod to understand that our resources have limits. Accepting our natural resources as limited is the first step towards protecting sustainability. Sustainability views a resource as more of a closed system with limits, instead of an open system with no limits.

The next step towards protecting sustainable resources belongs to each of us. We need to view ourselves as stakeholders and understand how our consumption and post-consumption decisions may impact resource sustainability. Even minor reductions in resource consumption, multiplied by thousands of stakeholders, respects sustainability. Unfortunately, volume alone won't be enough to insure quality resources on Cape Cod.

Water may be the gold of the future. On the Cape we have what has been referred to as a sole-source aquifer that we can think of as a closed system. The basic sustainable dynamics of water drawdown for consumption and rainwater recharge pale by comparison to the water quality issues our entire culture faces.

Cape Codders choosing to return even a small percentage of their property to natural vegetation will use less water, fertilizer and pesticide. Even these small steps become significant when multiplied by thousands of stakeholders. Less water removed from the aquifer translates into less salt-water intrusion. Fewer chemicals going into the aquifer speaks for itself. Any increase in indigenous vegetation translates into additional habitat for the Cape's indigenous animal species. This is a small example, of one small change, in one resource, that we can make on our own.

What role will state and town governments play in the future of sustainable resources on Cape Cod? On Cape Cod we are stakeholders in choosing our government. Are we choosing people who have chosen to be stakeholders in our resources?

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