



Brewster Conservation Trust

www.brewsterconservationtrust.org

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Ponds: Brewster's pride, Brewster's problem



Seymour Pond

Testing shows that it falls below the state limit for dissolved oxygen.

By Beth Finch

The ponds were changing. Swimmers noticed murkier water over several summers. Long-time residents told stories of how they used to be. Neighbors talked about it at the community beaches. There was concern, but before 2001 there was no data to support the observations.

Now, after countless volunteer hours, financial contributions from many organizations and individuals, testing at the Cape Cod National Seashore and the School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, there is a body of data confirming the anecdotes of deterioration.

The picture that emerges from the gathered information is of ponds with impaired water quality. This is what happens: phosphorus acts as a fertilizer. When added to ponds in larger than normal amounts it leads to excessive growth of plants and algae. The result to the casual visitor is that the water turns murky.

What is not seen immediately is that added nutrients can cause the occasional bloom of cyanobacteria (or blue-green algae) that emit toxins

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Brewster's Ponds

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that can be lethal to pets and wildlife. Excessive plant and algal growth also can reduce oxygen in the water and that can lead to fish kills. Both toxic outbreaks of blue-green algae and fish kills have already occurred in some Brewster ponds.

Leader of the PALS

In 2001, Carroll and Jane Johnson attended a meeting sponsored by the Cape Cod Commission and led by then Commission member and water scientist Ed Eichner, to discuss water quality on the Cape. The Johnsons had long been concerned about the condition of Long Pond where they live, and at that meeting Carroll generously volunteered Jane to help with the new program, Pond and Lake Stewards in Brewster.

It turned out to be a long-term commitment. Under the acronym PALS, Jane has spent the last seven years organizing 45 to 50 volunteers to sample water in 29 Brewster ponds (of the 44 named ponds and about 70 total ponds), gathering water samples to be tested for temperature, dissolved oxygen, murkiness, phosphorus and other criteria that indicate the health of the pond.

It's not been easy. As if organizing crowds of volunteers, keeping the scientific equipment at the ready, and maintaining the records were not enough, there was the matter



Making a difference

For almost eight years, Jane Johnson led the Pond and Lake Stewards of Brewster who took water samples from Brewster ponds for analysis. She organized the volunteers, managed the equipment, kept the records and helped her husband Carroll raise funds for the testing. Now she's turned the task over to Chris Miller, town director of natural resources. As a result of the PALS work under her leadership, we now know that the water quality of some of our ponds is not what it should be and, as important, we know what we need to do about it. Thanks to Jane Johnson and her volunteers, who have made a difference in Brewster.

of raising funds for the testing of the water samples brought to the Johnson's home by the volunteers. At first, Jane's status as working for Senior AmeriCorps paid her a modest stipend for her work. The funds ran out, but Jane continued.

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Let's top off the Quivett Marsh fund



Late afternoon sun lights up Quivett Marsh with a golden glow.

The sign, "Save this View," is gone from the Quivett Marsh Vista overlook and the town, working with the Brewster Conservation Trust, has made some significant improvements for your enjoyment, with fenced parking space, paths and a picnic table. But the tract beside Rt. 6A in West Brewster is not fully paid for yet and the need for your help continues.

When BCT and the town put together the deal last spring for buying the 4.3-acre parcel, once the site of the Skyline Motel and subsequently offered for sale as two house lots, funding was to come

from three sources, state, town and BCT. The state contributed \$351,156, the town \$100,000 from Community Preservation Act funds, and BCT pledged the remainder: \$224,000.

It was by far the largest commitment the BCT had ever undertaken and, truth to tell, the trustees had some nervous moments about the pledge they'd made. In fact, the fund-raising has gone very well, but not quite well enough. We still need to raise \$41,782 and we're determined to raise it by the end of the year – with your help.

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Did you know?

Quivett Creek was also known as Shuckquan by the native Americans, and Bound Brook by the colonists. All the land between the creek and what is now Rt. 6A was at one point owned by "Napoilon," presumably a native given a Christian name.

Quivett Marsh

From page 3

We've come this far with the help of the Brewster Foundation, the Mary-Louise and Ruth N. Eddy Foundation, the Fields Pond Foundation, the Dennis Conservation Trust, the Cape Cod Five Cents Bank Charitable Foundation, the Charles Thomsen Land Fund, former BCT trustee Fran Nickerson and many other generous folks.

But now we need to go over the top during the holiday season, the traditional season of charitable giving. We need this final support of all

Brewster property owners who appreciate the sweeping view from this roadside rest and, more importantly, understand the value of our marshes as marine life habitat, and the need to keep development at arm's length.

You can help bring this drive to a successful conclusion by using the envelope stapled into this newsletter or, a new convenience -- by donating online. Go to the website, brewsterconservationtrust.org, find the news about the Quivett Marsh Vista fund drive on the home page, and click on "DONATE HERE."



New bench offers broad view to Quivett Marsh Vista visitors.

Carr, Johnson exchange BCT chairs

The faces are familiar but the titles are new. BCT trustees at their September meeting promoted Elliott Carr from vice president to president and made Peter Johnson, president the past three years, their vice president.



Elliott G. Carr

Carr, beside a lifetime in banking (he was president of the Cape Cod Five Cents Savings Bank and a leader in state banking circles) has a number of interests, mostly related to the outdoors. He's a very fine bird photographer and famously walked all the way around the Cape, an exercise which prompted a series of articles and then a book, *Walking the Shores of Cape Cod*, written

regularly for the *Cape Cod Times* business section, the *Cape Codder* and the late *Cape Cod Vice*. Right now he's working on a couple of books, one a book of photographs and one on the East Coast of the United States.

Carr, who lives on Old Run Hill Road, is vice president of the Brewster Community Preservation Committee after several years as chair; he has been active in many civic roles in Brewster and on the Cape, ranging from co-chair of the Cape Cod Business Roundtable to the Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association board.

He's been a BCT trustee for a couple of decades, "from near the beginning," as best he can recall.

The trustees also elected Debra Johnson as clerk, succeeding longtime clerk Roger O'Day. Johnson was in the first West Point class that included women and retired from the Army as a major after a varied career that included assignment to the American embassy in Lithuania.

But one BCT officer remains unchanged: Peter Soule, treasurer for many years.

State help on Winn's Point Purchase

The state has approved BCT's request for a \$12,500 grant toward the purchase of Winn's Point on Upper Middle Pond. The total cost was \$25,000; the Cape Cod Five Cents Bank Charitable Foundation has contributed \$5,000.

The steep 2.5-acre parcel on John Wing's Lane was once a small cranberry bog. Last spring the Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts took temporary ownership; soon it will become BCT property.

Childhood camper now a BCT seasonal trustee

Wishing to tap the energy, enthusiasm and expertise of Brewster's many summer residents, the Brewster Conservation Trust recently established the position (or positions) of seasonal trustee. The first seasonal trustee is Vicki Plaut of Old Run Hill Road and Bethesda, Md.

Vicki has been a Brewster property owner for about 10 years, but her love affair with Brewster began as a child when she spent the summers camping with her family at Sweetwater Forest.

"We lived in New York City and my mother wanted to get her three small kids out of the city for the summer," she said. "We weren't well-to-do and so we were part of the canvas community. These were the days before electricity at the sites -- we depended on propane, the ice truck and the dairy truck. And we made a lot of friends."

The experience led to what Vicki called "a passion for the place. You don't have to own a home here to know that Brewster is special. The



Vicki Plaut

BCT is trying to maintain the beauty of the place and I'm happy to be a part of that."

Vicki went to the University of Chicago, law school at Northwestern and worked for a time in the environmental and natural resources division of the Justice Department. For some years she's been a full-time mom of three, two in college now and one in high school. Her husband, Richard Taranto, is an appellate lawyer in Washington.

Easy does it

The Brewster Conservation Trust is making it easier for friends to support the Trust and protect open space. Go to brewsterconservationtrust.org/ and click on **DONATE HERE**.

The 'authentic' Cape Cod cultural experience is being slowly worn away by the ubiquitous homogenization of the retail experience."

Anonymous source
National Geographic Traveler

BCT honors APCC

The Brewster Conservation Trust named the Association for the Protection of Cape Cod as Brewster's Conservationist of the Year at its annual meeting Aug. 6. BCT President Peter Johnson praised APCC for its work on Brewster environmental issues, particularly the restoration of salt-water marshes and the Stony Brook herring run and water quality bylaws, with both technical expertise and public education.

Maggie Geist, APCC executive director, accepted the award and then, as the meeting's main speaker, spoke movingly of the crucial importance of water, the unique life-giving characteristics of water, the duty to protect our water resources.

The program opened with a rousing trumpet salute by Gordon Brooks and ended with refreshments and conviviality.



Maggie Geist, executive director of the Association to Preserve Cape Cod (APCC), accepts a fish sculpture from Peter Johnson, then-president of the Brewster Conservation Trust, at the BCT annual meeting in August. The sculpture was fashioned by Bob Lindgren, former BCT trustee.

State grant helps buy Punkhorn addition

When Town Meeting voters on Oct. 19 approved purchase of the Bates property on the east edge of the Punkhorn Parklands, there was confidence that a state grant would help offset the \$1,180,000 purchase price. As expected, the state has announced a \$500,000 contribution, reducing the town's commitment to \$675,000 from Community Preservation Act funds.

The purchase removes a threat of home development next to the town's most significant open space, with vast drinking water reserves and recreation opportunities. It will be managed by the town Conservation Commission, as is the Punkhorn, with a permanent conservation restriction held by the Brewster Conservation Trust.

New Acquisitions

Small is beautiful, too

While BCT has been busy with its major fund drives to purchase critical lands at Quivett Marsh and Upper Mill Pond over the past year, it continues to quietly collect little nuggets of land through donations from generous Brewster citizens.

Jim Ehrhart, our former police chief and selectman, and his wife Ellen gave BCT title to a forest parcel of one-fifth of an acre in East Brewster last winter. This land, with frontage on Serenity Lane, abuts our 21-acre forest on Mitchell's Lane and provides a nice buffer to it.

Sam and Mary Biondi live off Route 137 and donated a one-tenth acre parcel of oak woods right along the highway.

Harry and Olivia Bassett owned the Bassetts' Wild Animal Farm on Tubman Road for many years before moving to Maine and then Florida. They had purchased a one and one-quarter acre chunk of Slough Swamp on Slough Road in West Brewster, originally part of the late Nathan Black's cranberry bog there, now grown over to blueberry and maples.

The Bassetts donated the bog to BCT this summer. Harry said that he and his wife have always loved wild animals and are pleased to provide a little sanctuary for them in Brewster, which they still love dearly. Their land gift connects parcels already owned by BCT and the town for conservation, making a protected wildlife corridor between the two.

Finally, Elizabeth Taylor, BCT trustee and Town Hall volunteer extraordinaire, donated a perpetual conservation restriction on 6.4 acres of her land on Run Hill Road. A long stretch of beech woods and open meadow runs to a small marsh at the north end of the town's Punkhorn Parklands. This restriction will add to the 875 acres protected in the Punkhorn area of Town.

BCT welcomes and honors land gifts of any size, as you can see here. We believe that even the smallest parcels, situated strategically, can provide micro-habitat protection, a scenic view, or add to an assemblage of already-preserved land. In our business, while "bigger is better," "small is beautiful" too!

Since our founding in 1983, the BCT has protected 705 acres of land in Brewster.

What do I know of the earth that its prior inhabitants
are not already aware of?

John Hay, *The Undiscovered Country*

Brewster Conservation Trust

Dear Brewster Conservation Trust members and friends,

Approximately twenty years ago Howard Hayes and Roger O'Day, two early chairmen of the Brewster Conservation Trust, approached me and asked for help with the purchase of a developable lot occupying the "view" between Brewster's windmill and Route 6A. The then fledgling trust borrowed the funds to purchase the lot; taking two uncertain years to extinguish the debt. My sense of awe and appreciation concerning the role the trust has played has grown and grown ever since.

During those 20 years, the trust has played a role in the preservation of more than 700 acres (almost as much land as the Punkhorn Parklands), and owns outright more than 300 acres. But only approximately \$1 million has passed through its coffers, slightly more than \$3,000 per acre owned, or \$1,330 per acre preserved.

The Trust owes this success to you – its members and friends. You have donated land to enable future generations to enjoy it the way you have, placed conservation restrictions on your land, and provided the necessary funds for the Trust to thrive.

Brewster has never been the wealthiest town on Cape Cod. But as one of the last towns to develop, we were left with more to preserve and a richer sense of opportunity and appreciation. Time and time again, Brewster's town leaders and voters have also stepped to the fore.

As president I must walk in the large footprints of my predecessors. I look forward to working with all of you to maintain the Trust's rich tradition of preserving Brewster as a beautiful place to live, work and vacation.

Sincerely,

Elliott Carr, president
Brewster Conservation Trust

Brewster's Ponds

From page 2

For the first two years, a Community Foundation grant allowed bi-weekly testing by the Cape Cod National Seashore. After that, the PALS were on their own, with Carroll Johnson as master fundraiser. Some ponds have neighborhood associations that provide volunteers and funds. The town contributed funds as did the Brewster Association of Part Time Residents. University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth has a grant that covers the fall testing.

Volunteers, although dedicated, were also problematic. Some are part-time residents; all have other commitments. The goal at first was to test every two weeks; as baseline data accumulated, testing became less frequent.

Not a nice report

Among the standards that Massachusetts has established for surface water, the most serious is the oxygen level, the terminal factor. Oxygen impairment is generally a result of excessive phytoplankton growth that, in turn, results from excessive nutrient concentrations, primarily phosphorus. As expected, the predominant nutrient affecting Cape Cod ponds is phosphorus.

A report on the 2001-2007 water sampling, "Brewster Freshwater Ponds: Water Quality Status and Recommendations for Future Activities," was filed in September by

Eichner, now at SMAST, and was funded by the Barnstable County Assembly of Delegates. It is available in the town's website www.town.brewster.ma.us under "Departments" and then the "Natural Resources" tab.

The study shows that the concerns of the neighbors and swimmers are justified. Of the 29 ponds sampled, 23 to 28 show phosphorus and chlorophyll concentrations higher than the standards for Cape Cod ponds; 24 to 29 show dissolved oxygen concentrations less than state minimum standards. Seriously low levels of dissolved oxygen are found in the deeper levels of some ponds.

Worse yet, phosphorus moves through the watershed slowly, about three feet a year. There is, therefore, phosphorus in ground-water now, primarily from septic systems, moving inexorably toward the ponds, where it will cause a further growth of plants and algae.

What can we do?

Brewster ponds are not only a source of recreation and beauty, but are the visible water table. What goes into the ponds will eventually be what goes into our drinking water or into the saltwater of our marshes and bays. What can we do about this?

The easiest way course is to assure that all ponds are surrounded by as much vegetation as possible -- land plants take up phosphorus before it reaches water.

The second easiest method is to locate septic systems at least 300 feet from ponds and have them pumped regularly. After that, it is more complicated.

In the study, data from six representative ponds (Seymour, Upper and Lower Mill, Walker, Canoe and Blueberry) were analyzed more extensively and an attempt was made to determine the source of the phosphorus, since it is the key for determining water quality. Wastewater is clearly a major source of phosphorus, but the contribution from road runoff and bird populations is unclear.

The report recommends more complete analysis of the other 23 ponds in the report, testing of all untested Brewster ponds and a management plan for each of the ponds.

Chris Miller, director of natural resources for Brewster, plans to continue to work with volunteers and neighborhood associations to continue the testing – and yes, he would welcome additional help; reach him at the Town Hall, extension 103.

Miller intends to do sampling in April and in August or September each year. The fall analysis will continue to be supported by the SMAST grant at UMass Dartmouth. Funds for the spring analysis must be raised – analysis of a full round of testing at UMass Dartmouth runs about \$3,200, says Johnson.

In the future, the town may finance studies to determine the sources of



Walker's Pond

"impaired by excessive nutrients."

phosphorus and plans for remediation. Plans for protecting and raising the water quality in Brewster ponds will be an important part of the town's integrated water resource management plan; hiring of a consultant to develop the plan is expected before the end of the year.

In the meantime, let's all do what we can. Maintain pond shore plantings, eliminate fertilizers from pond front properties, pump septic systems regularly, volunteer to be a member of PALS to sample water and raise funds for testing. The future of all Cape Cod, after all, depends on its water.

Contributions to BCT . . .

In Memory of

Arthur & Mary Allen
Thomas & Leslie Fedge
Bill Anderson
Jean & Roy Smith
Joseph Arico
Stephen & Christine Richards
Ruth Babcock
Kevin & Nancy Stewart
Wallace Baker
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A true conservationist
 is a man who knows
 that the world is
 not given by his fathers,
 but borrowed
 from his children.

John James Audubon

In Honor of

BCT's Work
 Walter & Anastasia Tretiak
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Memorials and bequests

What could be a more appropriate way to honor the memory of a loved one than to give a donation to the Brewster Conservation Trust "in lieu of flowers"? It's a gift that will help protect lands of special beauty or environmental value in Brewster. The BCT welcomes memorials and records them in our newsletter. The address to be used for that purpose is PO Box 268, Brewster, MA, 02631.

We also welcome bequests, which may be made in several ways. Mark Robinson of The Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts is available at 508-362-2565 or e-mail compact@cape.com for guidance on planning a bequest or gift.

BCT a busy partner in natural resource bylaw

Big decisions were made at the Brewster town meeting Oct. 19, but probably none will have the lasting effect of the Natural Resource Protection Design bylaw. It's the first such natural resource bylaw on the Cape, only the second in the state.

And Brewster Conservation Trust members played a significant role in bringing it to adoption with scarcely a dissenting vote.

Traditionally, conservation trusts acquire and protect open space. BCT has been doing that successfully for 25 years, but recently it has become active, more than most land trusts, in promoting environmental protection in other ways. To carry out this mission it has partnered with the town and other organizations. The effort it put into the new bylaw is a prime example.

To begin with, BCT trustee Don Keeran, who is assistant director of the Association to Preserve Cape Cod (APCC), learned that Shutesbury has a unique bylaw to protect its forestlands – a concept used in other states to protect natural resources. Town Planner Sue Leven saw it as a tool to protect Brewster's vulnerable groundwater. Both she and the Planning Board were strongly supportive of the bylaw; their leadership was instrumental in developing it and moving it forward.

Don, Peter Johnson and other BCT members attended town committee meetings, lobbied town officials and visited community organizations to explain the bylaw. BCT and APCC sent mailings, sponsored a forum at the Museum of Natural History and had a handout at the town meeting door.

Basically, the new bylaw requires that subdivisions in the public drinking water supply areas of southeast and southwest Brewster and the town's portion of the Pleasant Bay watershed be planned to protect natural resources such as wetlands and woodland habitat.

The number of new houses initially allowed on each parcel will be reduced significantly; major open space will be set aside; houses will be clustered to minimize the impact on the land, and water protection measures such as nitrogen-reducing wastewater treatment plants will be rewarded with bonus housing units.

It is hoped that the new bylaw will help the town avoid the expense of a massive sewer system, as Orleans and Chatham face today.

Among those who helped in the bylaw campaign were Elizabeth Taylor of the BCT and Planning Board, Joanne Hughes of the Board of Health, Beth Finch, Peter Soule, Debra Johnson, Hal Minis, Elliott Carr, Mike Lach, Jane Johnson, Jillian Douglas, and others.



Clean-up; Green-up -- This group of Brewster residents, young and old, fanned out across town last spring to participate in Brewster Green-Up Day. The event was sponsored by Stony Brook Elementary School's Green and Wellness Committees and they're going to do it again next spring, the weekend after the Brewster in Bloom celebration. So be watching for the announcement in the Cape Codder and posters around town, and pitch in to pick up the winter's deposit of roadside trash.

Organizers are Mara Liebling, Robin Perry and Stony Brook Principal Denise Fronius. The Brewster Police, the town DPW and Eddy Elementary's Community Service group provide trash bags, stylish yellow vests and other support. Countless cans, bottles and miscellaneous trash were collected last spring; let's double the effort next spring.

Sign up for Email

The Brewster Conservation Trust, wishing to cut the cost of mailings and improve communication on matters of conservation interest, would like to have your Email address. We anticipate such uses as environmental alerts and electronic newsletter delivery if you wish. Be assured that your address will be used only for direct communication with you on BCT business and your privacy will be protected.

To send us your Email address, you have several choices. You can jot it down on the attached envelope when you send in your contribution. Or you can send an Email message to Hal Minis, hminis1@gmail.com, or Peter Soule, pwsoule@comcast.net, so they may capture your address. Or you may call Hal at 774-323-0292.

To further improve communication, a committee led by Hal is working to redesign the BCT web page (brewsterconservationtrust.org/) into a more lively source of information.



Brewster Conservation Trust

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