

FROM THE **PRESIDENT** AND CHAIR





Tearing down barriers to the Bay

SOMETHING HAPPENED ON THE WEWEANTIC RIVER THIS YEAR

that hasn't happened in centuries: the river and the tide and all of the fish within them began flowing freely into the Bay.

The change occurred with the removal of a dam at the Coalition's Horseshoe Mill property in West Wareham. The dam's eradication is the realization of our work to restore natural passageways and wetlands habitat at the site for fish and aquatic plants. It also will open more of the river to kayaking and canoeing, fishing and walking, and more. Much work remains to be done at the site, and there are many more harmful dams along the Bay, but the dam's removal marked a critical milestone in improving the health of our watershed.

In 2019, we made significant progress in removing other barriers to improving and protecting our beautiful Buzzards Bay and watershed. In some cases, the obstacles have been physical and visible, as was the case at Horseshoe Mill; often, the hurdles consist of policies and practices that result in pollution and neglect, or in socioeconomic barriers that keep many people from using and enjoying our region's greatest natural resource.

On the water, our longtime efforts to address two of the Bay's largest sources of nitrogen pollution—the wastewater treatment plants in Fairhaven and Marion—resulted in agreements in each town to correct the problems at the facilities (p. 2). We also launched a new effort to help the Bay's salt marshes adapt to climate change (p. 5). And from Westport to Falmouth, the nitrogen-reducing septic system pilot projects that we are facilitating are showing promising results for improving water quality without draining homeowner's wallets (p. 7).

In the watershed, the effort to protect Cuttyhunk Island's unspoiled natural beauty forever advanced with support from the Town and millions of dollars raised in federal and state grants toward the effort (p. 10).

And with people, our outreach efforts are engaging school children in New Bedford and Wareham as well as adults throughout the watershed area (p. 14). Our Discover Buzzards Bay webtool reached a major milestone, now offering more than 250 places for free outdoor exploration across our region, breaking down information and accessibility barriers to the Bay (p. 13).

All of this work is made possible because of your incredible support. Thank you!



Mark Rasmussen, President/Buzzards Baykeeper®

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MISSION AND VISION

The Buzzards Bay Coalition is a membership-supported nonprofit organization dedicated to the restoration, protection, and sustainable use and enjoyment of our irreplaceable Bay and its watershed. The Coalition works throughout the Buzzards Bay and Vineyard Sound watersheds to protect and restore coastal, river, and drinking water quality and the upland forests, wetlands, and streams that support a healthy ecosystem. This work happens in three key areas: ON THE WATER, IN THE WATERSHED, and WITH PEOPLE.

OUR VISION:

- A Bay shoreline defined by safe swimming beaches, open shellfish beds, and stretches of scenic natural areas for all to enjoy.
- Healthy waters that support abundant fish, shellfish, and wildlife populations.
- A Bay safe from the threats of oil spills, industrial and sewer discharges, and ocean dumping.
- A watershed where rivers, streams, inland forests, and wetlands that buffer the Bay are protected.

2019 ANNUAL REPORT

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Persistence pays off in cleaning up the Bay's municipal wastewater plants

WASTEWATER TREATMENT FACILITIES operated

by Fairhaven and Marion have long discharged water with high levels of nitrogen pollution, and the negative impacts have been easy to see in nearby waters. Nitrogen represents the greatest threat to the health of the Bay. In nitrogen-polluted water, the clarity of the water is reduced, eelgrass beds die, and fish and shellfish slowly disappear.

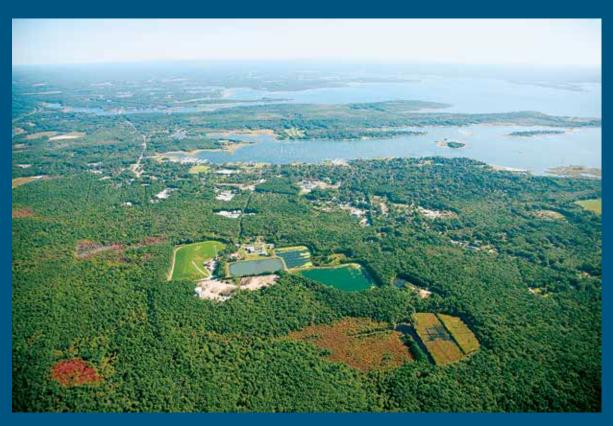
Nearly 20 years ago, water quality data collected by the Coalition's Baywatchers program highlighted the severity of nitrogen pollution in Sippican Harbor and Inner New Bedford Harbor. The findings prompted the Coalition to advocate for studies to identify the sources. Wastewater treatment facilities in Fairhaven and Marion were determined to be primarily responsible.

The Coalition's persistent advocacy efforts with municipal officials and state and federal

agencies—and after exhausting other options, filing a court complaint to require that Marion clean up its leaking sewage lagoons—yielded settlements this year. Under new federal and state requirements, both Fairhaven and Marion will be required to provide the highest levels of nitrogen removal.

With solutions agreed upon, the Coalition is excited to work with both towns on long-term, sustainable approaches to their wastewater infrastructure needs.

From a Bay-wide perspective, the modernization of the Marion and Fairhaven plants mark an important pollution cleanup milestone. Of the six municipal wastewater plants discharging to the Bay, four—West Falmouth, Wareham, Marion and Fairhaven—are now required to remove nearly 90 percent of nitrogen, yielding significant improvements to water quality. The last two to be updated are the New Bedford and Dartmouth facilities.



Marion's sewage lagoons and nearby Sippican Harbor.



2019 ANNUAL REPORT

ON THE WATER

WE ALL SHARE THE SAME VISION FOR BUZZARDS BAY: A SCENIC SHORELINE WITH

safe swimming beaches, open shellfish beds filled with quahogs, and healthy waters where fish and wildlife thrive. Our Bay is resilient; with sound science, the right laws, and proper enforcement, it can bounce back from the harmful effects of pollution.

Through science and advocacy, the Coalition is leading the way to protect and restore our local waterways for fish, shellfish, wildlife, and most importantly, people like you.

CHALLENGE

The most serious and difficult challenge facing the Bay is nitrogen pollution. It leaches from our home septic systems, seeps from lawns and cranberry bogs, and flows from aging sewer plants into sensitive harbors and coves. The Bay is also threatened by bacterial contamination, oil spills, toxic pollution, and increasingly by climate change.

STRATEGY

For more than 27 years, the Coalition has kept a watchful eye on the Bay's health through our nationally recognized Baywatchers monitoring program. But we don't just study the Bay; we put this science to work. Sound science forms the foundation of all of our advocacy efforts to restore and protect clean water.

PESULTS

We pursue Bay restoration and protection at all levels of government—local, state, and federal—and in court when necessary. Through strong advocacy, we're securing limits on nitrogen pollution, working with towns to update wastewater treatment, and always defending laws to make the Bay safer from oil spills.

Launching new efforts to help the Bay's salt marshes adapt to new threats

NEW INITIATIVE AIMS TO STEM THE ALARMING LOSS OF CRITICAL ESTUARINE HABITAT

Fish nursery, bird habitat, pollution filter, coastal shield: salt marshes play many roles that protect the health of Buzzards Bay and its communities. But salt marshes around the Bay are deteriorating, or disappearing altogether, due to accelerating sea level rise, nitrogen pollution, and other factors.

This summer, we began a long-term monitoring program to document and respond to this troubling trend. Every year, our science team will revisit 12 Bay marshes to record the species and health of plants and animals found there, and how tidal elevations and the surface of the marsh itself are changing.

We'll also start the new year with a new team member focused exclusively on salt marshes. The Coalition has welcomed a new postdoctoral research scientist who will review the current state of the Bay's entire coastline in order to identify the most vulnerable marshes. The research also will include testing a potential solution on a few marshes to make them more resilient to sea level rise.

Salt marsh loss is happening very fast. We need to understand what can be done quickly to sustain these vital habitats to protect the health of our Bay.

UP CLOSE: SEA LEVEL AND SALT MARSHES



The acceleration of sea level rise presents a new challenge for salt marshes. These habitats have historically adapted to rising sea levels by migrating inland and by trapping and building sediments to increase their elevation. In turn, plants within salt marshes have developed varying abilities to survive salt water exposure as tides flush in and out of the marsh. But the rapid change in the pace of sea level rise is making it harder for marshes to keep up, compounding the threat they already face from excessive nitrogen pollution.

- "The rate of increase in sea level that has been recently measured may exceed the ability of marshes to build up the soil by storing peat or trapping sediments. This could lead to faster loss than previously predicted."
- Linda Deegan, PhD, senior scientist at Woods Hole Research Center

LEFT Buzzards Bay Coalition researchers measure plots in a Bourne salt marsh.

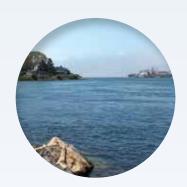
ON THE WATER | *Highlights of* 2019

In 2019, we continued our ongoing fight against nitrogen pollution in Buzzards Bay, defended the Bay against threats, and worked to prevent new sources of pollution from fouling our local waters. You can learn more about these projects and all our work to protect clean water through science and advocacy at **www.savebuzzardsbay.org**.



Defending strong protections against oil spills in court

The Coalition won an important court victory in the 15-year legal fight to protect Buzzards Bay from oil spills. In May, we intervened in a lawsuit brought by an oil transport industry group aimed at challenging the 2004 Massachusetts law that requires a tugboat escort for all barges carrying oil through the Bay. A federal judge ruled in our favor, keeping strong protections in place for our Bay and its coastline.



Reducing nitrogen pollution from wastewater in upper Buzzards Bay

The Coalition significantly advanced efforts to improve wastewater treatment in the Upper Bay. This U.S. EPA-funded work included estimating the treatment needs of the partner communities—Bourne, Wareham, Plymouth, Marion, and the Massachusetts Maritime Academy—and determining how to expand the Wareham wastewater treatment facility to accommodate those needs. The next phase of the project will evaluate costs and develop a funding plan.



Slocum's River joins Westport and Falmouth in receiving nitrogen cleanup plans

For two decades, water quality in the Slocum's River has suffered from significant nitrogen pollution. The effort to address the problem passed a major milestone in October, when the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection and the EPA finalized a plan to improve water quality in the river. The Coalition pushed hard to get this plan in place, and we will continue to be an advocate for following this road map to improving the Slocum's.



Powering research through access to sound data

One of the greatest strengths of the Coalition's water quality monitoring program is how it supports research throughout the scientific community. One such project by scientists at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, published this year, used our 30-year dataset to show that increasing algae — one effect of nitrogen pollution — denied Bay towns more than \$650,000 in revenues from recreational shellfishing over the past decade. In another multi-year study, measurements taken at Baywatchers sites showed that nitrogen pollution plays a large role in making Bay waters more acidic, making it more difficult for shellfish to grow.



ON THE WATER | Looking Ahead

Working with homeowners around the Bay to reduce nitrogen pollution

NEW SYSTEMS HOLD GREAT PROMISE IN THE EFFORT TO IMPROVE WATER QUALITY

Septic systems represent the largest source of nitrogen pollution to our coastal waterways. Even properly functioning Title 5 septic systems cause pollution problems. That's because they aren't designed to remove nitrogen from wastewater. The solution is a new generation of nitrogen-reducing septic systems that are increasingly effective and affordable.

Over the past three years, the Coalition has installed 30 nitrogen-reducing septic systems of many kinds around West Falmouth Harbor. In addition, the Coalition has helped install a dozen pilot "layer cake" septic systems in many towns around the Bay to test the effectiveness of this design. So far, the systems are performing exceptionally well, removing between 70 and 80 percent of all nitrogen.

In the coming year, the Coalition will continue to advance expansion of these new, more effective systems, working with town officials to make nitrogen-reducing septic systems the norm for construction all around the Bay.



"It has been so gratifying to work with the Coalition and the Wareham Board of Health on this project. Wareham has more coastline than any other town in the Buzzards Bay watershed and has shown real leadership in addressing the nitrogen problem."

-Tony and Wendy Pires, who installed a layer-cake septic system on their Wareham property



IN THE WATERSHED

WATERSHED PROTECTION IS ABOUT CONSERVING ALL OF THE PARTS OF THE

Buzzards Bay ecosystem—forests, wetlands, rivers, streams, and groundwater, as well as harbors and coves. These critical areas provide important habitats, protect our drinking water sources, and act as natural filters for the Bay.

Through watershed protection, the Coalition safeguards the region's forests, streams, and wetlands, and restores damaged areas so the Bay ecosystem can thrive.

CHALLENGE

Nearly half of the land in the 432-square-mile Buzzards Bay watershed is undeveloped and unprotected. The fate of these lands is fundamental to our efforts to protect clean water. Without saving the most important forests, streams, and wetlands from poorly planned development, the Bay cannot survive.

STRATEGY

We pursue a Bay-focused land protection strategy to conserve the watershed's most vulnerable forests and streams—natural areas that the Bay cannot afford to lose. We also restore damaged rivers, wetlands, and streambanks and help towns and land trusts preserve land in every corner of our region.

RESULT

The Coalition manages the largest land conservation program in Southeastern Massachusetts. Since 1998, we've protected more than 8,500 acres throughout the Buzzards Bay watershed. We're also restoring damaged streams, rebuilding wetlands, and creating better access for people to explore the outdoors in their community.

FRUIT

Restoring a river for the benefit of fish and people

DAM REMOVAL AND HABITAT RESTORATION EFFORT WILL REOPEN RIVER TO THE BAY

Buzzards Bay's rivers once ran silver with herring every spring. But their numbers have dwindled precipitously due to centuries of human impact from pollution and dams as well as overfishing. Through its science-based advocacy, watershed protection efforts, and restoration projects, the Coalition is turning that trend around, restoring healthy habitats for migratory fish, animals and plants, and people.

One of the Coalition's biggest restoration projects, the former Horseshoe Mill site on the Weweantic River, took a major step forward this year with the removal of a dam, which was a remnant of the iron works once located at the site. Although these abandoned factory buildings burned down in the mid-1900s, the dam was left behind.

Unmaintained, it sat across the river for decades, blocking access for fish and shrinking the habitat they use for spawning.

The dam's removal is a key step in improving migratory fish passage and habitat like salt marshes on the Bay's largest freshwater river. This work will also allow coastal habitats to adapt to rising sea levels and protect areas for important rainbow smelt spawning.

Through these restoration efforts, the Coalition will improve river access for people, too. Visitors will be able to enjoy Horseshoe Mill for hiking, fishing, and paddling, while learning about the site's ecological and industrial history.

UP CLOSE: REVIVING RIVER HERRING



Efforts to preserve and restore habitat for river herring and other migratory fish are showing promising results. Population counts of these critical fish species were up in three of Buzzards Bay's most important rivers—the Agawam, Acushnet, and Mattapoisett rivers—during spring 2019.

The improvements are not universal, however. Herring population counts dropped in the Wankinco River, Sippican River, and at Cedar Lake—all waterways with significant remaining barriers to fish passage.

The 2019 results—the good and the bad—underscore the importance of Coalition projects, such as the effort at Horseshoe Mill in Wareham.

LEFT Aerial view over the Horseshoe Mill dam on the Weweantic River, prior to the dam's removal

IN THE WATERSHED | *Highlights of* 2019

In 2019, we actively pursued new opportunities to protect and restore the Bay's most important forests, streams, and wetlands – the natural filters that support clean water. You can learn more about these projects and all our work to conserve land and restore damaged natural areas at **www.savebuzzardsbay.org**.



Preserving a jewel of natural resources in Dartmouth

Apponagansett Bay Farm's 128 acres of picturesque farmland, diverse wildlife, clean waters, and healthy wetlands exemplify what makes Dartmouth so special. Under a land protection deal coordinated by the Coalition, 53 acres of this former vineyard will remain active agricultural land, protected by a conservation restriction that prevents development. The remaining 75 acres, containing forest and salt marsh along Dike Creek, will be owned and managed as a public preserve by our partner, the Dartmouth Natural Resources Trust.



Cuttyhunk conservation campaign pushes forward

The Coalition's campaign to protect unspoiled Cuttyhunk Island made substantial progress. In May, Gosnold voters affirmed support for protecting more than 300 acres of the island and unanimously approved a \$400,000 contribution from the town. \$2.2 million in federal and state grants was also awarded during the year. The Coalition is continuing to pursue all potential funding avenues to complete Cuttyhunk's protection in 2020.



Restoring blighted property for a future riverside park

You may notice that a new patch of grass has opened up along the Acushnet River, in a place previously occupied by old cars and shipping containers. This summer, the Coalition's subsidiary, the Acushnet River Reserve, Inc, acquired the former site of Riverside Auto Sales and Salvage. Now cleared, the former junkyard will play an important role in the federal cleanup of toxic pollution in bordering salt marshes, and it will one day become a riverfront park.



Protection of Pine Island Pond lands

In October, the Coalition supported the Mattapoisett Land Trust in their purchase of 120 acres of woods and wetlands around Pine Island Pond. This model project was the first land conservation project to receive funding through the state's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Program, which supports climate change resiliency. Protecting the land behind Pine Island Pond's extensive salt marshes will give these marshes space to migrate inland as sea levels rise.



IN THE WATERSHED | Looking Ahead

Opening the Wheeler Forest Reserve in Woods Hole for water, wildlife and education

ACQUISITION PROTECTS LARGEST UNDEVELOPED PARCEL IN THE QUISSETT HARBOR WATERSHED

The new 30-acre Wheeler Forest Reserve, acquired through a generous private donation from the Wheeler family, will feature Coalition-led education programs as well as an office and barn meeting space for the Coalition, further strengthening our connections with the Woods Hole science community.

With its desirable location just outside the village of Woods Hole, the land could have been developed into 26 homesites (and septic systems draining to sensitive Quissett Harbor). Now, we look forward to preserving this vital forest habitat for wildlife, water quality and environmental education. Stay tuned for more on the opening of Wheeler Forest in the coming year.



The renovated barn on the Wheeler Forest Reserve will serve as an office and meeting space for the Coalition, strengthening our ties to the Woods Hole scientific community.

2019 ANNUAL REPORT

WITH PEOPLE

THE KEY TO A CLEAN, HEALTHY BUZZARDS BAY IS AN ENGAGED COMMUNITY THAT

understands the threats the Bay faces and their role in protecting it. The long-term health of our local environment depends on people knowing, loving, and valuing the Bay as important to their lives.

Through community engagement, the Coalition is creating a new generation of Bay stewards: people who understand their place in the Bay ecosystem and will support its protection for decades to come.

CHALLENGE

Buzzards Bay faces a crisis of disengagement. Fewer people today know the Bay and our local environment; most children grow up in front of screens rather than on sandy beaches. Without connections to the natural world, people have turned a blind eye to the Bay's decline. If we don't address this disengagement, we will ultimately fail to protect the Bay.

STRATEGY

Connecting people to the
Bay is a fundamental part
of our work. We tackle
disengagement head-on
through outdoor programming,
engaging events and
workshops, and vibrant print
and digital communications.
These efforts build stronger
connections to our local
environment to support
long-term stewardship.

RESULTS

Every year, thousands develop new appreciation for the Bay through our outdoor exploration programs. We're expanding a network of Bay discovery sites where all people can get outside, giving local decision makers solutions to pressing pollution problems, and rebuilding connections to the Bay through annual events like the Swim and the Watershed Ride.

Connecting everyone to their Bay

ONLINE TOOL PROVIDES THE INFORMATION TO GUIDE OUTDOOR DISCOVERY

Time and time again, we've seen that the people with the strongest commitment to protecting Buzzards Bay are those who use it, know it, and love it. That's why we created **Discover Buzzards**Bay (DiscoverBuzzardsBay.org), an online tool that helps local residents find unique and exciting ways to explore the outdoors, get some exercise, and connect with nature. Discover Buzzards
Bay is a free resource that everyone—of all ages, interests, and abilities—can use, providing a portal to hundreds of outdoor adventures across the Buzzards Bay region.

This year, we reached an exciting milestone when we passed 250 Places To Go on the Discover website. The website now features somewhere to explore in every town around Buzzards Bay and Vineyard Sound, from Little Compton to Aquinnah, and it will continue to grow.

We encourage you to visit the Discover Buzzards Bay website and find somewhere new near you to explore. None of what we accomplished in 2019 would have been possible without your support. We think the best way to celebrate is by getting outside and enjoying all that your Buzzards Bay offers.



Find your next adventure at DiscoverBuzzardsBay.org.



PROFILE: ROB AND LAURA JONES

Shortly after Laura and Rob Jones moved to Falmouth last year, they joined the Coalition for an open water swimming event in December and their participation has "paid out in dividends." Laura and Rob both went on to win first place in their age category at the 2019 Buzzards Bay Swim, and Rob was the very first swimmer across the finish line. "One of the very reasons why we moved up here was to be part of the water community," says Rob, saying that the two of them have continued to run into people they met through the two swims. "It shows me that people connected to the water have something in common, no matter what the rest of their lives are like," Laura added.

"One true enjoyment and privilege we're finding in living here is to have the water so clean and cared for that you can get in to swim whenever you want." - Laura Jones

WITH PEOPLE | *Highlights of* 2019

Throughout 2019, people like you took action to protect clean water and support the Coalition's work in communities across our region. You can learn more about all our opportunities to swim, ride, volunteer, or attend an event at **www.savebuzzardsbay.org**.



Raising record funds for clean water at the Buzzards Bay Swim

The Buzzards Bay Swim made a big splash this year, setting a fundraising record of more than \$187,000. The 346 registered swimmers also helped the Coalition earn a \$50,000 matching challenge grant from longtime swimmer and West Falmouth resident Larry Fish. Register now for the 27th annual Swim, which will take place on Saturday, June 27 at savebuzzardsbay.org/swim.



Taking on stewardship of historic life-saving station

This summer marked our first as caretakers of the Horseneck Point Life-Saving Station, a historic building that the Coalition inherited through its merger with the Westport Fishermen's Association. Between June and the end of August, the station saw nearly 600 visitors of all ages, who learned about Buzzards Bay and explored Westport's rich maritime legacy.



Cycling around the Bay to safeguard its beauty and resources

The 13th annual Buzzards Bay Watershed Ride shattered records with more than 300 cyclists raising over \$220,000 for clean water. Leading the way in team fundraising was the Bourne Rail Trail Blazers, whose members raised an impressive \$47,072 for the Bay while supporting the proposed bike path through Bourne. Register for the 2020 Ride on Sunday, Oct. 4 at savebuzzardsbay.org/ride.



Immersing schoolchildren in the Bay's riches

The Coalition has expanded its outreach program in the New Bedford public schools, allowing hundreds of fourth and fifth graders the chance to experience the city's harbor from its freshwater roots in the Acushnet River to where it meets the bay at East Beach. The effort will even make it possible to bring schoolchildren to Cuttyhunk to explore the Bay and the island's unspoiled natural beauty.



WITH PEOPLE | Looking Ahead

Opening the new Onset Bay Center



ONSET BAY CENTER WILL BRING SAILING, PADDLING, AND OUTDOOR ADVENTURE TO HUNDREDS OF CHILDREN AND ADULTS

This summer will mark a major milestone in our mission to engage everyone who lives on the Bay in connecting with the wonders of our coast.

The Coalition will open the Onset Bay Center, a modern facility for education programs and community events created through the renovation of the historic Onset Bathhouse.

The center will significantly expand our ability to offer high-quality, on-the-water programming for thousands of people every year. Through activities such as sailing, paddling, and shellfishing, the center will help community members of all ages build a personal connection to our local Bay environment.

The Onset Bay Center includes a complex of nearly 100 acres of conservation lands protected by the

Buzzards Bay Coalition. These lands include the coastal dune and beach at Burgess Point, which hosts our sailing program; the expansive salt marshes of Shell Point Bay; and the centerpiece of Onset Bay, Wickets Island, which the Coalition is improving for all.

"I learned that hermit crabs don't bite, and that there are no big fish to be scared of in the water... which makes me more comfortable to swim."

-Aiyana Monteiro, age 10, one of more than 100 kids who participated in our second summer of pilot programs in Onset with the Boys and Girls Club of Wareham and Wareham Public Schools CARE. **WHERE WE WORK** The Buzzards Bay Coalition works throughout the Buzzards Bay and Vineyard Sound watersheds to protect and restore the region's coastal, river, and drinking water quality and the upland forests, wetlands, and streams that support a healthy coastal ecosystem.



Beginning at Sakonnet Point in Rhode Island in the west, our service area runs along the watershed boundaries for Little Compton's coastal saltponds, then northeast along the Buzzards Bay watershed boundary until it reaches Nobska Point in Falmouth in the east. From Nobska, our work crosses to West Chop on Martha's Vineyard along the edge of Vineyard and Nantucket Sounds, then runs up island along the Vineyard Sound coastal watershed boundary to Squibnocket Point and Gay Head. Our western seaward edge is defined by the municipal boundary of the town of Gosnold until it meets the jurisdictional boundary for "MGL 21M, Chapter 251 of the Acts of 2004," which establishes the edge of compliance with oil spill prevention rules for tank barges entering Buzzards Bay.

The Buzzards Bay Coalition also monitors land use and supports water quality protection efforts in the Assawompset Ponds watershed in Lakeville and Middleboro due to the pond's historical physical connections to Buzzards Bay through the Acushnet and Mattapoisett Rivers and their role as the public drinking water supply for the city of New Bedford.





Dedicated to the restoration, protection and sustainable use and enjoyment of our irreplaceable Bay and its watershed. We work to improve the health of the Bay ecosystem for all through education, conservation, research and advocacy.

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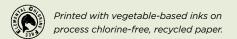
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