

OPC's Pond Protection Committee Revs Up for 2016

This committee, devoted to understanding the water quality issues of freshwater ponds since 2012, is planning a new direction for its 2016 work. Watershed based thinking is our theme. We all live in a watershed and affect the water quality in that watershed, so our catch phrase will be "What is your watershed address?"

With that theme, we will focus on two areas: fertilizer control and education, and interpretation of existing freshwater pond data.

Background:

As regards fertilizer control, the county wide wastewater management planning process, the so called 208 plan, allows towns to take a small credit against their nitrogen removal requirements if they have adopted fertilizer control regulations or bylaws under the Cape Cod Commission's District of Critical Planning Concern. Orleans and Eastham have done that.

However, little has been done in either town to let the public know about our responsibilities in protecting our waters from fertilizer and the ways in which we can control fertilizer or even eliminate its use. We hope to develop an educational plan which we can offer the towns, using demonstrations and public presentations. As part of this project, we plan to work with Association to Preserve Cape Cod on a Cape wide ponds educational program which will probably occur in the fall.

Regarding freshwater pond data interpretation, the Orleans Comprehensive Wastewater Management plan, as amended, does little to address the study of fresh water issues, although the BOS has adopted a set of goals and actions which require that the town's consultants begin to work to understand the accumulated data. So our second major focus will be to accelerate our understanding of the recent trends in freshwater pond water quality.

Neither town has had interpretation of its analyzed samples for some years. (For example, analysis may have shown, say, that the phosphorus in a particular pond is 6.7 mg/l at 6 feet down, but what does that mean for its water quality?) To achieve a fuller understanding, one of our members, a marine chemist, is working to regularize the reporting of 15 years worth of freshwater ponds sampling data in both towns. Equally important, in the absence of professional interpretation of this data for 4 years in Eastham and for 9 years in Orleans, another computer whiz, our president, will see if we can pull out some results which may give us some warning about worrisome trends. If such trends seem to exist, we may be able to point the towns to pond by pond action.

We will continue, however, our focus on specific ponds in the context of their watersheds.

At Boland Pond, a pond classified as impaired by Orleans Marine and Fresh Water Quality Task Force, our volunteer runoff study, when complete (one more storm sampling to go!) will provide the samples the School of Marine Science and Technology at U-Mass Dartmouth requires to evaluate whether the over nutrification of Boland Pond is partially caused by the runoff from these drains, some of which are

on private land. This study will give the town an additional tool for determining its focus in correcting runoff watershed by watershed.

Uncle Harvey's Pond, also designated as impaired, will provide our second specific pond and watershed focus. There we have met in 2015 with a group of concerned abutters, and this year we will work to help them understand the issues, including their own responsibilities, and advocate for them as well. The town owns a parcel abutting the pond and runoff from several roads enters the pond, so we will explore with the town its role in maintaining that parcel and correcting road runoff.

Finally, at the relatively unimpaired Pilgrim Lake, we will meet with interested residents who have requested our assistance in understanding what they can do to keep it that way.

All these ponds illustrate a common problem in water quality protection in outer Cape towns like Orleans where there is a very high percentage of second homeowners. In all cases, the process of education and advocacy is slowed by the relatively long absences of second homeowners.

We welcome your feedback. Let us know if we can be of service to you, your pond and your watershed!