

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*Pleasant Bay is an area of extraordinary natural resources and beauty. From tributary and marsh, to embayment, Pleasant Bay represents one of the most biologically diverse and productive marine habitats on the east coast of the United States.*

*Pleasant Bay's significance also stems from the many diverse ways people use its resources. Generations of residents and visitors have enjoyed the Bay's breathtaking views, harvested its shellfish, navigated its shoal waters, and appreciated its abundant wildlife. Over the years the Bay has also supported a variety of commercial activities and, today, people continue to rely on the Bay for their livelihoods.*

*The residents of the Towns of Orleans, Chatham, Harwich, and Brewster recognize the delicate and priceless resource entrusted to their care. At present, Pleasant Bay's natural resources remain healthy and productive despite decades of development and change. And while most of the historic uses of the Bay have been preserved, there is increasing competition for use of the Bay's resources among a variety of recreational and commercial activities. These factors have led the four Bay towns to understand that the long-term health of the Bay cannot be assumed and must be safeguarded. Accordingly, the towns have agreed to develop this plan for the on-going management of Pleasant Bay's resources.*

*An estuary left alone will nurture and care for itself with no help of human hands. It is only when human activities interfere with natural processes that the Bay responds by showing signs of stress, damage and disease. This stewardship plan for Pleasant Bay is intended to provide a practical framework for the towns of Orleans, Chatham, Harwich, and Brewster to work together to sustain the Bay's natural resources, and to promote a degree of use and enjoyment of those resources consistent with long-term sustainability. Accomplishing this will require residents, visitors, and businesses alike to place the long-term health of the Bay above individual interests. It will require change and sacrifice, and an on-going commitment to preserving the health, beauty, and tranquility of Pleasant Bay for future generations.*

*Pleasant Bay Resource Management Plan, 1998*

## BACKGROUND

It has been fifteen years since Pleasant Bay was designated an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), eight years since the Towns of Orleans, Harwich, Chatham and Brewster embarked on developing a resource management plan for the ACEC, and five years since the Towns of Orleans, Chatham and Harwich voted to adopt the plan and form the Pleasant Bay Resource Management Alliance to implement it. Each of these steps has deepened our understanding of the Bay and our commitment to protecting the many values it provides for the surrounding communities.

This report is intended to fulfill a requirement to update the resource management plan on its five-year anniversary. Accordingly, this report summarizes implementation actions taken by the Alliance and the towns to date, recommendations carried forward, and new issues and recommendations for action. It is intended to describe progress, and to chart a course for the coming five years of coordinated management activity.

The words on the previous page were written to help to set the tone for the original *Pleasant Bay Resource Management Plan*. The statement speaks of a recognition by the towns surrounding the Bay of the unique treasure entrusted to their care, and a commitment to stewardship that cuts across many distinct and often competing activities and interests, as well as town boundaries. The update report carries forward this theme, and the guiding vision that is embodied in the following four goals:

**T**o sustain and, wherever practicable, regenerate the health and productivity of the Bay's eco-system, including its water quality, diverse animal and plant life, tidal marshes, ponds, rivers, bays, islands, and beaches;

**T**o encourage levels of recreational, residential, and commercial activity in the Bay and its watershed, including physical structures, that are consistent with resource sustainability and that promote a high degree of public safety and enjoyment;

**T**o enhance opportunities for public access to and enjoyment of the Bay, in balance with resource sustainability and private property rights; and

**T**o preserve the features that contribute to the Bay's unique character including its natural beauty, tranquility, history and accessibility.

In 1998, the Towns of Orleans, Chatham and Harwich endorsed these goals by voting to adopt the plan and form the Pleasant Bay Resource Management Alliance to coordinate implementation of its recommendations. In 1999, the Secretary of the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs also approved the plan. Although Brewster has not participated as a formal member of the Alliance, the town and the Alliance have kept an open line of communication regarding issues of concern to the Bay.

## **PLANNING AREA**

The study area addressed in the resource management plan and this update includes the boundary of the ACEC, and the entire marine water re-charge area (watershed) for the Bay. With the help of the Cape Cod Commission, the towns were able to map the planning area and a variety of physical, natural resource and human use features using geographic information systems (GIS), a computer-based mapping application. This marked a significant step forward in the development of tools to aid in the management of the Bay.

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management (DEM) has undertaken the *Coastal ACEC Boundary Clarification Project*. The project is intended to make the mapped representations of the boundary more consistent with the written descriptions adopted by the state and the involved communities. For example, DEM was able to clarify boundary lines using digital reference data (such as mapped wetlands, and streams) that were not available at the time when the original boundary maps were made. The update does not change the designated boundary, but improves the accuracy with which it is represented on a map.

Over the past two years the Alliance has been working with representatives of DEM to identify areas that are described in the designated written boundary description of the Pleasant Bay ACEC that were not clearly represented on any state or local maps. As a result of the Boundary Clarification Project the total acreage within the ACEC is now recorded at 9,240 acres rather than the 9,050 acres previously recorded. The magnitude of change in the covered area is (2%) and is consistent with updated boundaries in other ACECs on Cape Cod. The boundary clarification does not alter the resource management plan adopted by the towns. However, the revised boundary will be reflected in new maps and documents created by the Alliance.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE PLAN UPDATE**

The update is organized into three main sections, each of which contains a number of chapters.

*Section 1: Overview of the Resource Management Plan Update* provides background on the original plan, a description of the process undertaken to develop the plan update, and a key highlights of the plan update.

*Section 2: Update on Resource Management Plan Issues and Recommendations* contains in-depth discussion on resource management issues, implementation activities and new or updated recommendations. The section has eight chapters which embody the original five key management areas outlined in the plan: *Sustaining the Bay's Biodiversity*, *Managing the Bay's Fisheries Resources*, *A Regulatory Framework for Shoreline Structures*, *Managing Environmental and Safety Impacts from Boating*, and *Enhancing Public Access Opportunities*.

Some of the original five categories have been broken out into multiple chapters in the plan update. This does not reflect a broadening of the scope of the plan, but rather recognition of the complex nature of issues within each original management issue category. The eight chapters in this section of the update are:

- Chapter 3: Water Quality Monitoring
- Chapter 4: Ecological Inventory and Habitat Protection
- Chapter 5: Protection of Wetlands
- Chapter 6: Watershed Planning
- Chapter 7: Fisheries Management
- Chapter 8: Shoreline Change and Regulation of Structures
- Chapter 9: Waterways Safety and Navigation
- Chapter 10: Public Access and Historic Resources

*Section Three: Implementation Issues*, addresses the issues and accomplishments associated with the Alliance's administrative and organizational structure.

As with the original resource management plan, the update is intended to be a blueprint for action, requiring on-going steps to implement recommendations, monitor progress, and provide for adjustments as needed.

## COMMUNITY REVIEW PROCESS

The plan update was developed over the past year by the Alliance Steering and Technical Resource Committees, with input on various sections from representatives of the Cape Cod Commission, Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management, Cape Cod National Seashore, Barnstable County, and other local municipal and civic organizations.

A public review draft of the plan update was submitted to the Boards of Selectmen in each Alliance town in January. At that time each Board was asked to sponsor an article at their Annual Town Meeting to adopt the plan and continue the Memorandum of Agreement forming the Alliance. Copies of the public review draft were available for review at the Town Hall and main public library in each Alliance town, and on the Alliance's website, [www.pleasantbay.org](http://www.pleasantbay.org). Three public comment meetings (one in each Alliance town) were held to solicit comments and answer questions. The draft plan update was also sent to county and state agencies for comment.

The Alliance Technical Resource Committee reviewed input received from the public comment process and recommended some modifications to the draft plan update. The Technical Resource Committee then recommended the plan update to the Steering Committee, which in turn voted to forward the plan update to the Towns. Copies of the plan update are available at the Town Hall and main public library in each Alliance town and on the Alliance website [www.pleasantbay.org](http://www.pleasantbay.org).