



Five Year Strategic Plan 2015 -2020

November 2015

APCC's Mission

The mission of The Association to Preserve Cape Cod (APCC) is to preserve, protect, and enhance the natural resources of Cape Cod.

The Vision for Cape Cod

A Cape Cod where waters are restored and protected, natural landscapes and wildlife habitat are preserved, and where growth respects the character of town centers and rural lands.

Context and Background

In 1968, a group of visionary citizens saw the threat to Cape Cod in the form of a massive dredging project designed to destroy one of the most ecologically valuable spots on the Cape – Nauset Marsh. Sadly, those threats continue to challenge our sense of place and now take many additional forms including climate change, water quality impairments, degraded fisheries, sprawl, and coastal protection schemes that actually make our coast more vulnerable. In response to these threats, APCC works for the adoption of laws, policies, and programs that advance our mission and vision to counter these threats.

APCC's Areas of Critical Concern and Focus

Bays, Sounds and Ocean: Cape Cod is completely surrounded by salt water. Fish, marine mammals, beaches, the ocean and its flora and fauna are the basis for Cape Cod being a desirable place to live and recreate. A clean, functioning salt water ecosystem operating in harmony with human existence and enjoyment is critical to a sustainable future.

Estuaries: Estuaries are bodies of water and surrounding coastal habitats typically found where rivers, streams and groundwater meet the sea. Estuaries harbor unique plant and animal communities because their waters are brackish—a mixture of fresh water draining from the land and salty seawater. Estuaries are some of the most productive ecosystems in the world. Many animal species rely on estuaries for food and as places to nest and breed. Humans also rely on estuaries for food, recreation and jobs. Cape Cod is blessed with scores of estuaries.

Salt marshes: Salt marshes are coastal wetlands that form transition zones between land and sea. They provide essential habitat for wildlife, serve as nurseries for fish and shellfish, store floodwaters and protect our shorelines against storm surge damage. Salt marshes also act as natural purifiers by filtering pollutants and sediment and by absorbing excess nutrients from streams, rivers and surface runoff before they can reach coastal waters and drinking water supplies. Cape Cod salt marshes provide nesting, feeding and breeding habitat for a variety of animals as well as incredible views and vistas.

Ponds: There are over 1,000 freshwater ponds on Cape Cod. Ponds are a valuable natural resource, and are a direct link to the Cape's aquifer. They provide us with critical services such as freshwater and food. Individual ponds vary significantly in their size, depth and species composition and therefore contribute more to regional biodiversity than other freshwater habitats. In addition to their importance to aquatic species, ponds provide drinking water, food and refuge for birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles and insects. Ponds are in peril from surrounding land use, wastewater impacts, fertilizer and stormwater runoff, and emerging contaminants, which degrade water quality and accelerate natural eutrophication processes.

Anadromous fish runs: River herring are a crucial link in the coastal food chain. During the spring and summer, many fish and wildlife species eat herring as the herring migrate to their spawning areas in the freshwater ponds of Cape Cod. In the ocean, herring fill an important niche as food for much of our commercial fish harvest and sea birds. River herring are a keystone species; that is, a species whose health and well-being reflects the overall state of the coastal ecosystem. They reflect watershed problems, such as man-made alteration of the natural hydrology, and water pollution. River herring have an important role in the history and coastal economy of Cape Cod and other coastal communities from the Mid-Atlantic region up through New England. River herring populations have been declining in the mid-Atlantic and northeast coastal regions for several decades, particularly from the late '90s on. Because of their decline, there has been a moratorium on taking or catching river herring since 2005. In 2011, a petition to list them as endangered was submitted to the National Marine Fisheries Service. The decline in river herring is symptomatic of environmental problems that are impacting other fish, wildlife and entire ecosystems.

Village Centers: The essence and heritage of Cape Cod is village centered life and commerce. In the latter half of the twentieth century, sprawl and development accelerated growth away from our village centers, altering the character of the Cape and shifting the retail economy away from the village. Poorly executed growth and development is one of the primary environmental challenges the Cape faces. Poorly planned development pollutes the Cape's water and air and adds to traffic congestion.

Developments of Regional Impact: Defined by the Cape Cod Commission Act, developments of regional impact (DRI) are those development proposals presumed, because of their magnitude or the magnitude of their impact on the natural or built environment, to present development issues significant to or affecting more than one municipality.

Climate Change: Cape Cod is among the most vulnerable of geographic locations subject to the effects of climate change and sea level rise. It is one of our greatest environmental challenges. Concerning issues such as beach erosion and coastal resiliency, strengthening our green infrastructure, impacts to aquatic and terrestrial habitats, protecting drinking water supplies, promotion of renewable energy (both terrestrial and offshore) and energy conservation, and the adoption of policies that will prepare our region for climate change are of critical importance.

APCC's Goals for 2015 through 2020

APCC's goals transcend a broad range of organizational roles including education, advocacy, stewardship, and restoration. A broad goal is for APCC to be the leader and champion for restoring Cape Cod's coastal resources. Accomplishing this goal will require improving educational outreach; advocating on multiple levels for stepped up funding of restoration projects; managing, planning and constructing viable restoration projects; and using science based strategies for success.

In addition to continuing APCC's efforts which promote wastewater planning and solutions Cape-wide, monitoring of herring populations, salt marsh restoration and protection, and multiple other initiatives, a number of goals for 2015 through 2020 have been identified. These projects and tasks have been organized into education, advocacy, and stewardship and restoration, recognizing that overlap exists between and across the three areas of focus. APCC also realizes that other challenges will likely emerge and will require APCC to respond and adjust priorities to preserve, protect, and enhance the natural resources of Cape Cod.

Education Goals

APCC's core program is focused on education and outreach concerning the environmental challenges facing Cape Cod. Workshops, lectures, natural history walks, outdoor classrooms, newsletters, email, website, and documentary films are the tools most commonly used.

- **Cultivate an environmental ethic:** Science is a powerful way of knowing and explaining the relationship between human society and the natural world. APCC strives to use science-based tools and principles to foster a stronger connection between humans and the environment.

Measures of success: increased membership and financial support of APCC; improved

“State of the Cape”; measurable community commitment to clean water and the environment (e.g. votes at town meetings).

- **Complete the Cape Cod Critical Habitat Atlas:** In 2012 APCC began an update of our 1990 *Cape Cod Critical Habitat Atlas*.

Measures of success: completion of the Cape-wide update and digitization of the 1990 atlas.

- **Increase natural landscapes without use of chemicals:** APCC has launched an initiative to promote the use of native plant species by homeowners and professional landscapers. By creating an interest among consumers to use native plants, local nurseries will be encouraged to stock a larger inventory. Native plants are not just an environmentally preferred alternative to the non-native plants commonly used in landscaping, they are typically hardier and better adapted to thrive in this region. Consequently, native plants require less water, fertilizer and pesticides. Eliminating the need to fertilize or apply pesticides helps protect our groundwater, ponds and coastal embayments.

Measures of success: reduction in the use of fertilizers by 50 percent (baseline is Cape Cod Commission inventory); establish a baseline of pesticides and chemicals used in landscaping across the Cape; establishment of demonstration gardens/landscapes and/or recognition of Cape Cod settings which favor native species over exotic ornamentals, where lawn is minimized and water is conserved.

Advocacy Goals

APCC works for the adoption of laws and regulations, and implementation of policies and programs that protect, enhance, and restore Cape Cod’s waters, wetlands, habitats and natural landscapes, and community character. The organization engages government agencies on the Federal, state, regional and local levels as well as its members and the general public to effect positive change. APCC serves as the regional watchdog against harmful development or policies that could adversely impact Cape Cod’s environment and community character.

- **Provide environmental collaboration and leadership:** APCC has organized summits of environmental organizations and will continue to aspire to leadership in developing partnerships and collaborations to restore and protect the Cape’s ecology.

Measures of success: Achieve a minimum of five collaborations per year focused on

APCC targets; APCC recognized as the environmental leader by local and regional media.

- **Support and advocate for decommissioning of Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station:** In 2014, APCC found that the Pilgrim facility is a significant environment threat and challenge for the region. Measurable environmental harm is occurring from plant operation and there is potential for even more significant harm from plant failures. The poorly designed plant is functionally obsolescent and poorly maintained.

Measures of success: Participation and leadership in the decommissioning of the plant.

- **Implement an updated regional Clean Water Act Section 208 Plan:** In 2015, Cape Cod will update its Clean Water Act section 208 plan, an area-wide plan for attaining and maintaining water quality standards. This is an update of a 1978 plan that correctly identified water quality challenges but for the most part was not implemented except for drinking water protection. The Cape has a unique opportunity to lead the nation in innovative water quality technologies.

Measures of success: Increase in local funding in the \$20 to \$40 million dollar range per year for water quality projects over the next five years; measurable community commitment to the 208 plan (e.g. votes at town meetings, overrides etc.).

- **Advocate for an environmentally sound canal crossing system:** Cape Cod is an island with connection to the mainland via two old and obsolete bridges. Public safety requires improvements to the current crossing. Much of the land surrounding the canal is environmentally sensitive and valuable, including the water reserve in the northern portion of Joint Base Cape Cod.

Measures of success: improved safety without additional destruction or development of protected land.

- **Reform zoning laws:** For several years, APCC has actively advocated for reforms to the state's zoning and planning laws which have been identified as among the worst in the nation for their inability to allow communities to plan effectively for growth, protect natural resources, and preserve community character. Existing state law actually serves as an impediment to local planning by allowing developers to easily circumvent efforts to improve zoning bylaws.

Measures of success: passage of a reform bill consistent with APCC values; elimination of preexisting nonconforming protections; abolishment of the approval not required (ANR) procedure for certain subdivisions of land.

- **Protect Cape Cod from development and other environmental threats:** APCC will continue to scrutinize development proposals, projects, and other activities that have the potential to adversely impact the Cape’s environment and community character. *Measures of success:* prevention of harmful projects and the reduction of new impacts and threats to the Cape.

Stewardship and Restoration Goals

APCC monitors the environment to determine changes and trends across a broad range of resources with a primary focus on water and water quality. Through a variety of programs, APCC promotes responsible use, management, and appreciation of the Cape’s sensitive natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations. Additionally, APCC collaborates with governmental agencies and other nonprofit organizations to restore the natural environment impacted by human activities on Cape Cod. In addition to carrying out scientifically viable research, APCC acts as a repository of information concerning the environmental quality of the region.

- **Increase wetlands restoration efforts:** Humans have been altering and filling wetlands for centuries. These alterations result in increased flooding, loss of recreation, decreases in wildlife, loss in diversity of plants and animals, increases in the mosquito population, and decreases in overall water quality. Human-created tidal restrictions have a particularly negative impact on salt marshes.

Measures of success: acres of wetlands restored; acres of wetland buffer area enhanced; miles of fish passage improved; and tidal restrictions removed.

- **Restore agricultural use of Windstar Farm in Sandwich:** In 2011, APCC published Agricultural Land Use On Cape Cod noting that Windstar Farm, the largest farm on Cape Cod, contained the largest concentration of prime agricultural soils. The farm has an extensive water and irrigation system and was sitting fallow despite being the only farm on the Cape with an agricultural preservation restriction (APR).

Measures of success: restoration of agricultural activities; enforcement of the APR by the state.

- **Mitigate climate change:** APCC will work with Federal, state, and regional policy-makers to help address the environmental challenges our region faces from climate change.

Measures of success: increased resiliency of the Cape’s coastal resources; increased emphasis on strengthening our natural green infrastructure; adoption of legislation to implement a state plan for climate change preparedness.

Organizational Goals

To accomplish the above goals, APCC must continue to grow and attract public support. The Board of Directors is committed to making APCC a model of competence and excellence not just for this region but the nation.

- **Maintain prominence as region's environmental leader:** Through vision and collaboration, APCC will further emerge as the leader in a regional approach to environmental management.

Measures of success: reference by local and regional media as the Cape's leading environmental voice or similar descriptions; build reputation for scientific integrity.

- **Increase APCC membership:** APCC has been and remains a member driven organization. The vitality of its members is the core of the organization.

Measures of success: increased number of members and average member support.

- **Create financial sustainability:**

Measures of success: operate in a fiscally sound manner by keeping administrative costs low and using reserves only to obtain a measurable environmental benefit.

- **Implement succession plan for organizational leadership:**

Measures of success: no board or staff vacancies; system for having a president-in - waiting.

Approved by vote of the Board of Directors on November 16, 2015.

For progress, changes and accomplishments related to this plan, please visit www.apcc.org.