

Cape Cod's Freshwater Ponds

Our Ponds

The Cape's some 1,000 ponds were formed by large chunks of glacial ice that left depressions in the land. Called kettle ponds, these bodies of water cover nearly a quarter of the Cape's terrain. They are connected to groundwater and are often referred to as "windows on our aquifer".

Our freshwater ponds are important and complex ecosystems, home to a variety of wildlife, some of which are state-listed threatened species like the scarlet bluet damselfly. Many ponds are **coastal plain ponds** that support a globally rare plant community and include rare plants such as the Plymouth Gentian. The anadromous river herring begin their lives in Cape Cod's freshwater ponds before moving to the ocean where they live as adults and return to these ponds in spring to spawn. The catadromous American eels live their adult lives in the ponds, traveling downstream to the ocean where they migrate to the Sargasso Sea to spawn. The historic water connection of the ocean to freshwater ponds is critical to the life cycle of these species and others.

We enjoy ponds for recreational activities like swimming, fishing, kayaking, birdwatching and scenic vistas. Property values are enhanced by proximity to ponds. Despite how appreciative we Cape Codders may be of our ponds, their health is threatened.

Threats to Pond Health

Pollution from untreated stormwater discharge, sediments from erosion, excess nutrients from septic systems and fertilizers, invasive species, warming due to climate change, alteration and over-use, and harmful cyanobacteria blooms, all have negative effects on the health of our ponds. When a pond has high levels of nutrients, it is said to be eutrophic. Unnatural eutrophication of our ponds results in low oxygen, fish kills, bad odor, algal blooms, and potential toxic cyanobacteria blooms.

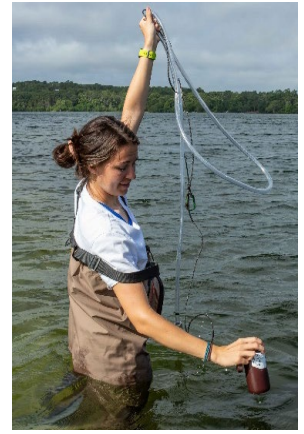
As pond health degrades, toxic cyanobacteria blooms may become more prevalent. The toxins can be harmful to people and pets by ingestion or even breathing the airborne toxins, which can cause a variety of symptoms varying in severity. If you see a bloom, **avoid it, and report it** to your local board of health.



Mercury pollution remains a problem. Many of the Cape's ponds have a fish consumption advisory due to mercury pollution. For more information on the state's health advisory see <https://www.mass.gov/lists/fish-consumption-advisories> for freshwater fish consumption advisories by pond.

What is Being Done to Help

- Many Cape towns and pond associations have been sampling and monitoring water quality in ponds for years. We know there are problems.
- Working been with researchers, towns, Barnstable County, and volunteer groups, APCC has established a [cyanobacteria monitoring program](#) to help towns identify potential toxic blooms and post warning signs.
- APCC's [Restoration Coordination Center](#) is working with communities to improve historic connections of ponds to the ocean to preserve important habitat and to protect water quality with improvements to stormwater systems.
- APCC encourages homeowners to employ [eco-landscape practices](#) and maintain a natural buffer of vegetation around pond edges.



APCC intern Kathleen Mason sampling for cyanobacteria

What You Can Do

The health of the Cape's ponds and lakes depends on all of us.

Here is what you can do to help:

If you're a pond visitor

- Pick up litter.
- Don't trample the shoreline vegetation.
- Pick up your dog's poop.
- Follow rules and restrictions posted for each pond.
- Park in designated parking areas only, not on a trail or into the woods.
- Don't feed the waterfowl.



APCC's eco-friendly landscape

If you live on a pond

- Join a pond group or start one!
- Reduce lawn area and plant more native species.
- Reduce chemicals that enter our water – don't use fertilizers or pesticides on your yard and be thoughtful about what you put down the drain.
- Rinse boats and paddle boards brought from other ponds and lakes to avoid transfer of aquatic invasive species.
- Maintain a naturalized swath of native vegetation between your lawn and the pond.
- Control roof runoff – consider rain gardens in your landscape design.

Support local organizations like APCC that work to monitor cyanobacteria and educate the public about preventing pollutants from getting into our surface waters.

Invite APCC to give a presentation to your neighborhood association or civic group!

Find more information on pond health at APCC.org

Contact: Kristin Andres, Associate Director for Education at kandres@apcc.org

