Ramps are for Boats, Not Runoff

Improving water quality by treating stormwater pollution at public boat ramps



What is stormwater?

Stormwater is water from rain or melting snow that flows across the land instead of being absorbed into the ground. This flowing water, or "runoff," can occur on various soil and surface types, but is most common on hardened surfaces like pavement, rooftops, and lawns. Boat ramps are generally points of direct discharge where stormwater flows untreated into our freshwater ponds and coastal embayments.

Why is it a problem?

Harmful pollutants are flushed with the stormwater downslope into receiving waterbodies which can lead to nutrient impairment and bacterial contamination. These pollutants impair water quality, pose health risks to humans and wildlife, and can lead to closures of beaches to swimming and areas to shellfishing. In addition to concerns of human and environmental health, both federal and state agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have set standards that require communities to manage stormwater to meet specific water quality goals defined in the Clean Water Act.

What is the solution?

Highly porous surfaces like sand and porous pavement allow rainwater to soak, or permeate, into the soil. Vegetation with deep roots also take up rainwater and reduce the volume of stormwater moving through the landscape. By utilizing these principles of natural permeation and filtration, we can design management systems, or green infrastructure best management practices (BMPs), at public boat ramps to improve water quality and overall ecosystem health.



This project is being done in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game Office of Fishing and Boating Access and the following towns: Barnstable, Bourne, Brewster, Dennis, Falmouth, Harwich, Mashpee, Orleans, Sandwich, and Yarmouth. Funding for this work has been provided by a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Southeast New England Program (SNEP) Watershed Grant in partnership with Restore Americas Estuaries.

