

Enjoying Your Waterfront Property

The Plymouth Conservation Commission encourages all property owners to join with them in working to preserve the beauty of Plymouth's ponds, wetlands and waterways. We hope that you will become one of the many responsible residents dedicated to a landscape/use design that affords protection of the unique community of plants and wildlife that exist locally. We offer these reminders and suggestions to assist waterfront property owners with their landscape considerations.

Everyone lives in a watershed. Plymouth's drinking water comes from the ground, a sole source aquifer. Septic systems, improper disposal of hazardous wastes, fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides all potentially threaten the quality of this drinking water.

Water from every yard and property flows through the ground into our ponds and wells.

The two top sources of pollution are lawns and septic systems:

Nitrogen and phosphates from these sources stimulate algae growth in our waters clouding the ponds and harming fisheries.

Excess Bacteria in water from leaky or outdated septic tanks, is harmful to aquatic ecosystems and may make water unsafe for swimming

Toxic Chemicals from gasoline and waste oils, improper use and disposal of pesticides and herbicides, leaking oil tanks, toxic cleaners, painting materials, and chemicals in batteries are a danger to humans and wildlife.

Laws may regulate certain work on or near waterfront properties.

Massachusetts has a mixture of state, local and federal laws designed to protect surface and groundwater, wetlands, floodplains and aquatic resources. Historically, when a loophole was discovered or a law did not work as anticipated, the legislative response was to pass another law.

State and town laws require a site visit to any property within 100 feet (the buffer zone) of a wetland resource area prior to any work.

What can you do?

1. Minimize lawn size. Keep the major portion of your property in its existing contours and natural vegetation. Natural landscaping helps preserve Plymouth's rural charm and special character, reduces nitrogen load in our ponds and requires less cost. Avoid nitrogen and water dependant bluegrass. Choose instead mixed species, drought tolerant grasses.
2. Pump septic systems. Reduce water use from the house. Pump every two years to prevent overflow.
3. Preserve existing wetlands. Wetlands are natural pollution buffers and wildlife habitat. Don't fill them in. Create buffer zones of native vegetation along ponds or streams.
4. Dispose of hazardous materials safely. Never pour oil and hazardous chemicals on the ground or into your septic system. Take them to the landfill on hazardous waste day.
5. Contact the Conservation Commission. Big projects such as docks, house additions or vegetation and tree removal require detailed review by agencies charged with enforcing our laws. For smaller projects, state regulators have agreed to a policy reducing permit requirements for activities within the 100 foot buffer zone if: a) Alteration within the buffer zone is less than 5000 square feet or 10% of the buffer zone on the lot whichever

is less; b) At a minimum, a 50 foot wide area of undisturbed vegetation in the buffer zone along the resource area is provided; c) The buffer zone does not contain estimated wildlife habitat of rare species; d) Stormwater is managed according to DEP standards; e) Erosion and sedimentation controls are provided at the limit of work to protect the resource area; f) The buffer zone does not border an Outstanding Resource Water; g) A site visit is conducted to verify the project is limited to the buffer zone and the criteria are met.

This new policy allows for such things as: small unpaved pathways for private use; fencing-provided it does not constitute a barrier to wildlife movement; cordwood piles; planting of native species of trees, shrubs and groundcovers but excluding turf lawns; conversion of deck to lawn or lawn to deck; vista pruning —the selective thinning of branches or understory shrubs to establish a "window" to improve visibility. Vista pruning does NOT include the cutting of trees resulting in a reduction of leaf canopy to less than 90% nor the mowing or removal of understory brush.

The Plymouth Conservation Commission serves the people of Plymouth by protecting our natural resources through acquisition, management, education and regulations.