

IMPLEMENTING COASTAL WATER QUALITY PROTECTION ON CAPE COD

Ed Eichner, Cape Cod Commission

Maintaining or restoring coastal water quality is a goal that most can support. Challenges arise when this goal is translated into action. With over 80% of our 400 square mile peninsula contained within estuary watersheds, the Cape Cod Commission is actively involved in the on-going development of coastal water quality protection strategies. Development of estuary-specific protection strategies requires reliable scientific assessment, but also proper consideration of existing regulatory, community character, and funding concerns. Current water quality protection activities on Cape Cod include resolution of many technical assessment issues through the Massachusetts Estuaries Project. MEP assessments include watershed delineation, land use and nitrogen loading assessment, benthic habitat characterization, measurement and modeling of tidal flushing, water quality modeling based on citizen-collected data, and development of nitrogen thresholds. As these assessments are completed, further efforts will be necessary to resolve many of the often-overlapping regulatory issues, including state TMDLs, town septic system regulations, and county performance standards. Additional efforts will also be necessary to provide: 1) wastewater infrastructure improvements to meet nutrient reductions, 2) management mechanisms to ensure that infrastructure improvements meet performance goals, 3) accommodations for future growth and economic opportunity, and 4) comprehensive review of potential impacts on land use and community character. All of these efforts will continue to require public support in order to develop sufficient funding.

Management Implications in the Barnegat Bay/Little Egg Harbor and Mullica River/Great Bay Systems:

Effective management of water quality in coastal estuary systems requires a host of coordinated activities among a number of organizations, governments, scientists, and the general public. Experiences on Cape Cod may provide lessons that will create a clearer path to effective management of the Barnegat Bay/Little Egg Harbor and Mullica River/Great Bay systems.
