



**Do we want this?...**



**... or this?...**

In April, West Tisbury residents gathered at a visioning workshop sponsored by the planning board to identify critical issues facing our town. Not surprisingly, water quality in our ponds and watershed health was a top concern, and a citizens group was formed. This communication is a result of the work of this group.

Water quality in our coastal ponds is profoundly impacted locally by nutrients from our septic systems and by our use of fertilizer for lawns. This is a proven fact based on many years of annual water quality sampling by the Martha's Vineyard Commission and the Great Pond Foundation, and evidenced by increasing frequency of shellfish closures and toxic cyanobacteria blooms in our ponds. Nitrogen isotope testing indicates that 53% of the nitrogen in TGP is comes from our septic systems, 27% is attributed to fertilizer use, and the remainder comes from atmospheric deposition.

We all want to be able to continue to harvest shellfish from our ponds, to restore eel grass, to preserve and enjoy nature and wildlife, and to swim and recreate safely on and in our ponds. Most importantly, we want to pass on these experiences to our children and grandchildren.

How do we do this?

1. Eliminate all use of lawn fertilizer and reduce the size of lawn areas. Ensure that all of your property managers and landscape staff are adhering to these directives (Questions? The Vineyard Conservation Society has a Vineyard Lawns Project with helpful information. <https://vineyardconservation.org/vineyard-lawns/>). This is an easy remedy that will have significant benefits.
2. Implement innovative and alternative (IA) septic systems, and/or utilize urine-diverting and composting toilet systems. IA systems can remove up to 85% of nitrogen from wastewater, keeping this out of our groundwater, streams and ponds.
3. Preserve and restore natural vegetated buffer zones around wetland resource areas- this vegetation slows down runoff, catches silt and pollutants, and absorbs nutrients (BiodiversityWorks can help; participate in their Natural Neighbors Program; <https://biodiversityworksmv.org/programs-projects/natural-neighbors/>). The Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act and town wetlands protection bylaws mandate that any work proposed within one hundred feet around ponds, vernal pools and vegetated wetlands, and within two hundred feet of rivers and streams requires review and a permit from the town conservation commission.
4. Support Land Preservation Efforts. Land is the best buffer to absorb excess nutrients and chemicals that could flow into the ponds. Intact native landscapes can filter and prevent 75% or more of the nitrogen from entering our ponds. Support non-profits that are protecting the unique natural habitats on our island.