

USDA invests in the Cape Cod Water Resources Restoration Project

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has invested \$10 million to restore and protect water quality on Cape Cod. Some 16 individual projects that will include installation of fish passages, storm water remediation and salt marsh restoration are being funded as part of the Cape Cod Water Resources Restoration Project.

The Cape Cod project is one of 48 multi-year projects that received funding last year to build vital infrastructure while conserving natural resources in 20 states through the [Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program](#). NRCS works with local groups to help prevent floods, protect watersheds, improve agricultural water management and enhance wildlife habitat through this program.

"Water quality is a major concern on Cape Cod, particularly its effect on salt marshes, shellfish beds and herring runs," said Christine Clarke, NRCS State Conservationist for Massachusetts. "The Cape Cod Water Resources Restoration Project is a strong, locally led partnership of federal, state and local agencies. This funding will result in significant long-term benefits Cape-wide."

The Cape Cod Water Resources Project watershed plan and environmental impact statement was authorized in 2009 and included 76 projects across Cape Cod. These projects would restore 1,500 acres of salt marsh, protect 7,200 acres of shellfish beds through improved storm water management and create fish passages that will provide anadromous fish with access to 4,200 acres of spawning habitat.

Twenty-three of the projects originally identified in the Cape Cod Water Resources Project Watershed Plan were completed between 2010 and 2013. Work on several of the new sites is already underway. Completion of all 16 projects is expected by fall 2019.

Among the 16 new projects is a recently completed storm water management project at Oyster Pond in Chatham. Oyster Pond is a marine tidal estuary and highly productive recreational shellfish area. Soft shell clams, quahogs and oysters are the bivalve species found in the pond. The pond also supports a four-acre oyster farm, the only shellfish farm in Chatham, as well as a popular bathing beach and recreational boating.

The Chatham Health Department maintains 18 water quality sampling stations throughout Oyster Pond to monitor bacterial levels and sources of contamination. The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries' Shellfish Division classifies the pond as conditionally approved and is vulnerable to bacterial levels exceeding thresholds of safe consumption. Non-point source pollution is the targeted contaminant to maintain good water quality.



The first inch of storm water runoff from a one-acre town road and parking area was treated to remove 80 to 90 percent of fecal coliform bacteria, the primary pollutant that governs shellfish sanitation regulations in Mass. In the spring of 2018, infiltration deep sump catch basins with leaching galleys were installed along a town access road to Oyster Pond. The runoff from the parking area was treated with a sand filter surface trench.

This storm water practice installation is the last component of a runoff treatment strategy for Oyster Pond. Chatham previously installed three other storm water practices to eliminate and reduce bacterial runoff sources.

Nationwide, NRCS invested \$150 million in watershed projects late last year, working with project sponsors, such as conservation districts, local governments and American Indian tribes. The projects take place in smaller watersheds that cover 250,000 acres or less.

In Massachusetts, project sponsors are the Cape Cod Conservation District, the Barnstable County Commissioners, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs and all 15 Cape Cod towns. NRCS worked with these sponsors to identify project sites.

NRCS serves as the primary technical adviser to project sponsors because of its engineering and environmental expertise and ability to deliver science-based technology and knowledge about the watershed's natural resources and ecosystem.

The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program has helped communities address critical needs on flood control, water management, watershed protection and development. This strong federal, state and local partnership has resulted in the construction of more than 2,000 watershed projects that help communities in every state in the nation and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. These watershed projects reflect a federal investment of about \$6.2 billion and deliver an estimated \$2.2 billion in average annual benefits nationwide.

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