

Students at Tisbury School Adopt Stormwater Drains

There are 639 stormwater drains in Tisbury! If those drains are clogged with leaves and debris, rain-water cannot enter them and polluted water pours down our roads into our waterways.

To help, Tisbury Waterways, Inc. (TWI) has launched an exciting new program called Adopt-a-Drain, funded by a grant from the Edey Foundation. While DPW focuses on the drains on the busiest streets, TWI volunteers can maintain stormwater drains on neighborhood streets. Jheyson Da Rocha, a seventh grader in Sue Adamo's science class at the Tisbury School, is the first student to adopt a town drain as part of the new program. (See photo at right.)

The seventh-grade science classes recently heard about Adopt-a-Drain from members of the TWI board.

After hearing about the kinds of pollution swept into the town's 639 drains during rainstorms, and the problems created when storm drains are clogged, the classes are adopting local drains. They will care for and keep their surfaces clean as part of their science curriculum and community service requirement.



Photo by Sandy Cannon Brown

Jheyson Da Rocha at the stormwater Drain he adopted.



Students were excited about the program and used the classroom time to pose questions and brainstorm creative names for their adopted drains. Science teacher, Sue Adamo, believes this activity ties in well with a unit planned for later in the year when TWI sponsors a water pollution program taught by environmental educators from Felix Neck. Evidence of that program are the medallions placed near drains in past years in downtown Vineyard Haven warning of pollutants traveling to nearby water bodies. (See photo at left.)

The Tisbury School students are the first to participate in TWI's Adopt-a-Drain project. Modeled after similar programs in many cities and towns, the TWI program aims to enlist the public in a partnership with the town to monitor and provide regular surface cleaning of the storm drains throughout the town. The goals for this pro-

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gram include reducing flooding in problem areas, reducing the workload of limited town personnel, and educating the public about managing stormwater to reduce both flooding and pollution.

The general public is invited to join students in adopting drains. It's easy to sign up for a drain in your neighborhood. Simply go to the [Adopt-a-Drain project](#) page on the TWI website, fill out the form and submit it to TWI. A TWI member will bring you supplies and instructions for keeping the drain cleared of debris so that it functions well.

Adopted drains are entered on the Town map on TWI website with their chosen name and location. Jheyson Da Rocha named his Da Rocha's Dump.

Introducing the Tisbury Natural Resources Advisory Committee

After two-plus years of "*Tisbury Waterways Committee*" meetings, the Tisbury Select Board voted in September to change the name of this committee to the "*Natural Resources Advisory Committee*" (advisory to the Natural Resources Dept.). This change was prompted in part by input from TWI and confusion regarding the reference to "Tisbury Waterways." The Select Board also reconstituted the Committee by replacing three former members with new members, while adding two alternate members with voting privileges when they sit in for an absent member. Our perception is that this restructuring may bring an elevated sense of environmental stewardship to the decision process.

The Committee has finalized its recommended changes to Chapter I of the "Town of Tisbury Waterways Regulations," which deal mostly with the use of the Town's waterways by active vessels (inactive vessels will be restricted). Live-aboards will be subject to additional guidelines and restrictions, and no more houseboats will be allowed (two will be grandfathered). The Committee will now move into Chapter II, Moorings Regulations, involving moorings policy and fees associated therewith.

The most recent Committee meetings have focused on permitting of new aquaculture sites and regulations in Town, with substantial input from the town's shellfish growers, two of whom are members of the Committee. At present, there are no aquaculture sites in Tashmoo, and

various conditions there (eelgrass, large productive areas of quahogs, and boat moorings) will make approval of such sites challenging. Aquaculture operations in Lagoon Pond are limited and struggling due to poor water quality, conflicts with vessels, and the current requirement that bottom cages must be used in the Lagoon, where the muddy bottom and lack of oxygen inhibit shellfish survival. Proposed changes to the regulations would allow the use of cages suspended below the surface and/or floating cages. An oyster aquaculture site in the Eastville area of Vineyard Haven Harbor is doing well, as are sites in other parts of the Vineyard.

As noted in the article on the following page, the Select Board in the Spring approved an anchoring ban in Tashmoo. After concerns surfaced, in an effort by the Select Board to establish a reasonable compromise, four transient moorings designed for overnight use were installed by the Harbormaster on the east side of Drew's Cove, and four more were installed in the former popular summer anchorage off the west side of the boat channel in the northern end of Tashmoo. The latter four will be day moorings, with rafting likely allowed (three boat maximum) on a first-come, first-served basis. The Select Board is also considering allowing small vessels to anchor in the clam flat on the west side of the Tashmoo channel, away from eelgrass, so that local residents and others can access that area while clamming.

For a number of years, TWI has sponsored a summer assistant to help with the increased activity in Lake Tashmoo, either an assistant with the Harbormaster, or with the Shellfish Department. In recent years, Nelson Sigelman has filled this role, working under the direction of Danielle Ewart, Tisbury Shellfish Constable. We asked Nelson to write an article for the newsletter describing this year's experience. The following are his observations. We thank Nelson for his contribution.

Tashmoo Anchoring Moratorium Was a Measured Success

During summer weekends I work for the Tisbury Shellfish and Harbor departments on Tashmoo Pond. My job as an assistant is partially funded by TWI, includes a variety of responsibilities, and draws on many skills. I teach novices to hold a quahog rake without bending as if they are planting rice. My olfactory senses and stomach do not rebel while using the shellfish skiff to dump the rank bait barrel outside Tashmoo. (See photo below.)



And it demands significant diplomacy to press Islanders to comply with the dinghy dock rules (or any rules for that matter), operate their boats safely inside Tashmoo ("slow down" is my repeated message), and tell visitors they should not swim, snorkel, or float on an air mattress (It may seem obvious, but it's not.) in the busy Tashmoo channel.

Over the last five years, I've watched scores of Island and mainland boaters anchor in Tashmoo on nice weekend days. Families and friends enjoyed on-the-water picnics. And sometimes they partied.



That changed following [the Select Board's March 2022 vote to prohibit anchoring in Tashmoo.](#)

Despite a concerted effort that included emailing area marinas and new signs on the jetty (Photo above) and osprey pole, I was uncertain how visiting boaters would react to this significant change.

My first encounter of the season didn't augur well for the summer. I told a man in a center console out of Falmouth with two teens aboard that he'd have to raise his anchor. He became angry and began shouting at me that Tashmoo was now "only for the rich." He said he first came to Tashmoo with his father many years ago. Now, he was there with his sons. It was a family tradition, he

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said. He decorated his personal history with a few choice expletives. My experience of being yelled at as a newspaper reporter served me well. I moved off to let him digest the unhappy news. Ten minutes later, having struggled to raise his anchor in the wind, he motored over to me and apologized for his outburst. He said he knew I was only doing my job. He departed, and I felt much better about life and people.

I am pleased to report that the rest of the season went surprisingly well. Although boaters expressed great disappointment, they reacted, almost without exception, politely once I explained the environmental circumstances and told them that the town would be installing a limited number of day moorings.

I relied on common sense and discretion throughout the summer to mitigate disappointment. On one occasion, a Hinckley out of Edgartown with two elderly couples on board anchored up to enjoy

lunch. I directed them to a vacant mooring that was rarely occupied so they could enjoy lunch. (In a Tashmoo Pond Mooring Survey I conducted on August 12 and available from the harbor department, I noted 77 empty moorings.) Rather than simply ask boaters to leave, I often recommended they visit Lambert's Cove or Tarpaulin Cove. I gave directions to boaters who carried advanced electronics but were unfamiliar with the local geography.

My job was made easier in August with the installation of four town moorings south of the osprey pole and four at the head of the pond, available on a first-come, first-served basis. I recommend adding four more day moorings by the osprey pole in keeping with the character of our welcoming marine community.

Overall, it was a very good summer. The Tashmoo community is interesting and fun, and I was grateful for the help and cooperation I received.

How Do We Manage All of These Enhanced Innovative & Alternative Septic Systems?

In 2016 the Town of Tisbury Board of Health (BOH) adopted a regulation for certain properties within the critical watersheds leading to Lake Tashmoo and Lagoon Pond, requiring the installation of enhanced de-nitrification technology capable of addressing both the Town's sanitation and denitrification needs.

In 2021 the BOH amended its regulation to define the standard for denitrification systems: one that discharges not more than 13 mg/liter of nitrogen, removes at least 75% of septic nitrogen, and is approved by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection for general use, provisional use, or piloting use for nitrogen reduction. Most recently, at its September 26, 2023 meeting, [*the BOH again revised the reg-*](#)

[*ulation*](#) to include as a "trigger" the transfer of property ownership.

In October 2023, Tisbury submitted a [*Lake Tashmoo Targeted Watershed Management Plan*](#) (Tashmoo TWMP) to meet the nitrogen reduction requirements of the 2015 Massachusetts Estuary Project for Lake Tashmoo. This 20-year plan incorporates both conventional (e.g., sewerage) and alternative nitrogen reduction technologies. The latter includes enhanced innovative and alternative (Enhanced I&A) septic technologies as defined in Tisbury's BOH regulations. The plan also includes a sewer extension in the B2 zoning district, a cluster wastewater system at Lake Street Park, remediation of stormwater discharges and fertilizer reductions. The TWMP

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includes a target of up to 838 septic upgrades to Enhanced I&A technology, accounting for nearly 74% of the plan's proposed nitrogen reduction. A smaller number of upgrades may be sufficient if the system's performance is better than initially projected and/or if West Tisbury chooses to implement nitrogen regulations similar to Tisbury's. (See photo at bottom of page of a KleanTu® 1200 gal/day installation on Daggett Ave in Tisbury. These systems are currently performing better than the Tisbury requirements.)

With the Town dependent on this many septic upgrades, relying on property owners alone to manage technology selection, installation, maintenance and testing, would lead to inefficiencies, confusion, and potentially a lack of faith in Tisbury's efforts. An important component of the TWMP is creation of a Responsible Management Entity (RME). One example is the RME set up for Barnstable County communities by the Massachusetts Alternative Septic System Test Center ([MASSTC RME](#)). According to this concept, the RME could manage every aspect of the I/A system's lifecycle, from the permitting and installation of a system, to its long-term operation and monitoring, providing the confidence in the ability of this technology to be used as a tool to improve water quality.

There are several models for managing septic upgrades, ranging from a simple homeowner awareness program all the way up to system ownership by the municipality. While property owners may balk at someone else owning the septic on their property, an Operation and Maintenance RME model, similar to that created by MASSTC, could provide great assistance to homeowners. On the

Vineyard, an island-wide RME would be desirable, as town-by-town solutions will unnecessarily duplicate efforts. TWI encourages a more intense effort coming from the MVC that would bring island towns together on this initiative.

Paying for all of these new Enhanced I&A systems, as well as their maintenance, is a critical issue. Placing all financial responsibility on the homeowner is an enormous burden. [A December 6 Opinion piece in the Martha's Vineyard Times](#) discussed the issue. An alternative is a financial model similar to Centralized Wastewater Management (sewering), in which homeowners pay a portion of the cost (perhaps half), while the remainder is spread across all Town taxpayers. After all, clean water is a benefit to all, not just those who live within the watershed.

There are other options for financial assistance. Recent state legislation provides a tax credit for up to \$18,000 to homeowners who make these upgrades (Restrictions Apply). There are also grants such as MassWorks that the town can apply for to help subsidize costs.

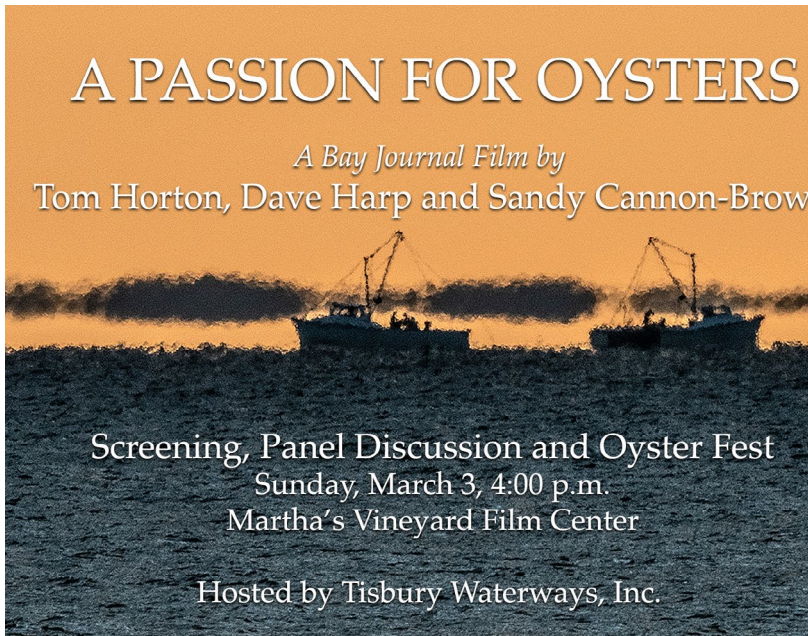
TWI supports a multifaceted approach to cleaning up our waterways and will keep track of new developments as they occur. Many details need to be worked out - Do we work as a Town or across Martha's Vineyard to set up an RME? What does that RME look like and who will be responsible? How do we pay for it? We'll keep you advised of progress through our website and our newsletters.

TWI Thanks Scott Horsley for his contributions to this article.



On Site
Out of Sight
Photos courtesy of John Smith,
KleanTu®

Join TWI March 3 for a Celebration of Oysters



Oysters aren't much to look at. You could say they are true and literal sticks in the mud. Yet these humble bivalves have inspired piracy, shooting wars and centuries of social and environmental conflict. All this ado about oysters is explored in a new documentary, *A Passion for Oysters*, that will make its Island premiere on March 3 at the Film Center in Vineyard Haven.

Tisbury Waterways, Inc., is hosting the event that will include a screening of the film, an oyster feast, and a panel discussion with local oyster farmers, scientists, and policymakers. One of the filmmakers, Sandy Cannon-Brown, is on the TWI board. She moved to Vineyard Haven in 2020 from the Chesapeake Bay, where she and her partners – writer Tom Horton and photographer Dave Harp – made

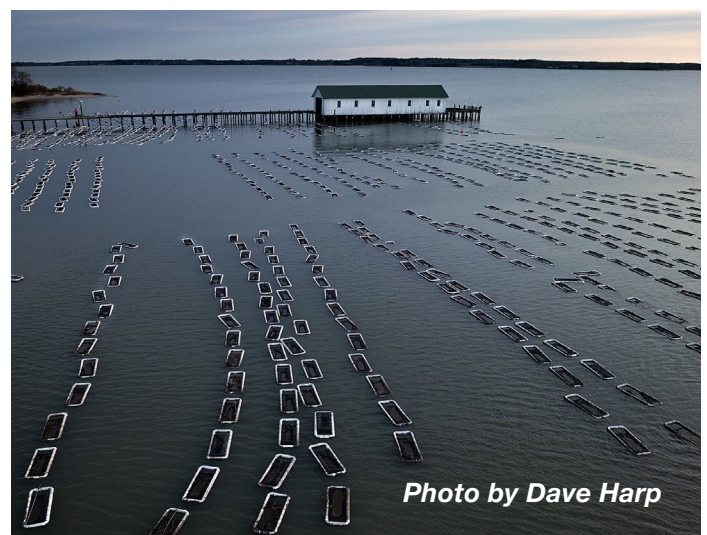
many acclaimed films about the Bay. *A Passion for Oysters* is their most recent.

The film, produced with the highest production values and an original music score, covers the history, life cycle, value of, and controversies about oysters. Among the comments from viewers:

“Superb film...a pleasure to view. Great photography and video, but especially great interviews.”

“...the film does a great job of exploring the combined and sometimes competing interests of oyster restoration efforts by oyster farms, sanctuaries, scientists/environmentalists, and free-range watermen in the Bay. The film is very informative and includes a lot of great archival material covering the history of oyster fishing...”

“Terrific! A whole new appreciation for oysters. Very informative from so many perspectives. Well done. Thank you.”



Aquaculture, the primary way oysters are raised on Martha's Vineyard, is relatively new to the Chesapeake Bay.

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Digital Newsletter

In November 2022, the TWI Board made the decision to implement a digital newsletter; rather than continue with a printed version to be mailed. This decision will result in considerable savings in printing costs, conserving valued donor funds. In addition, we will now have the capability of providing direct links to various internet content (underlined blue text). Please visit our website to donate to TWI or to add your name to our email list.

Mission Statement

Tisbury Waterways, Inc. (TWI) is a citizens' non-profit organization that serves as a steward of Tisbury's waterways. TWI acts as a catalyst and advocate in support of municipal, educational and research programs designed to improve local marine water quality.

Visit our Website: www.tisburywaterways.org

We Need You to Join TWI!

To TWI Supporters: Our organization depends on contributions from readers like you to support the programs and projects that make a difference in improving local water quality. We encourage donations, but we don't want to bother you with December fundraising or "Giving Tuesday" solicitations. You get enough of those. And, as noted above on this page, we have gone digital. You will no longer receive the contribution envelopes that accompanied our newsletters and reminded you to send a donation. This enables us to direct more of the precious donations to our programs.

As TWI defines membership, all contributions of \$50 and above are considered membership dues. But membership is expected to be renewed annually. We resist chasing our donors down to remind them to "pay their yearly dues." So please consider this as a friendly reminder to join TWI or renew your membership by making a contribution in 2024.

Because we want to spread the news about the environmental, educational, and environmental efforts we support, we have kept our newsletter free to anyone who expresses an interest. Did you know, though, that less than 20% of those who receive the newsletter are TWI members (contributors)? That percentage might be even lower if we didn't count the generous donations that come from those who attend our annual Seafood Cocktail Party.

Please support TWI with your annual membership. You can donate by credit card or PayPal through our website, TisburyWaterways.org. (Click on "Join" on the upper right of our Home Page, or scroll down on the Home Page itself.) You may also contribute by check, sent to the address shown at the top left of this page.

We Thank You for Your Continuing Support!