

A Message from Melinda Loberg, TWI President

The lovely photo above (from Board member Henry Stephenson) highlights beautiful Lake Tashmoo at its best. This edition of the TWI newsletter shares with you our concerns with the Lake. Except for TWI, there is no “friends of” organization dedicated to Tashmoo, and no other advocates except the folks who live nearby and the users of this great Tisbury town resource.

In recent years Lake Tashmoo has experienced a dramatic increase in visiting boaters from across the Sound. We have long recognized that healthy eelgrass beds are a signal of a healthy pond. To protect valuable eelgrass beds, much of the pond has been closed to anchoring, confining these day-tripper recreational boats to a small area near the western flats inside the channel on the right. Tisbury Waterways believes that this activity by recreational boaters will only increase, especially since the Edgartown Select Board just voted to close Cape Pogue (another popular destination from nearby Cape Cod) to anchoring this summer.

Tashmoo has long lost a productive scallop fishery. Now, due to increased boating activity, it is experiencing expanded closures to shell fishing. The competition among the various users of the lake is gradually killing the resource. This is compounded by the increase in groundwater flow containing nitrogen from residences all through the watershed that extends into West Tisbury.

In this newsletter, you'll read about the need for a Lake Tashmoo Management Plan. You'll also see separate articles about specific water quality issues. Even this year's environmental scholarship recipient, introduced on Page 4, has a Tashmoo connection.

We hope to see many of you at our special late-summer gathering. (See “Save the Date” on Page 4). There are many concerns to address, and TWI needs your help and your voices in addressing them.

Warm regards,
Melinda Loberg, *President*

Revisited Waterways Regulations – Impact on Tashmoo

Proposed revisions to regulations governing the use of Tisbury's principal waterways could have significant effects on the health and environmental well being of those waters, especially Lake Tashmoo. Those with property abutting or close to Tashmoo, and boat owners who use Tashmoo, should pay close attention to these proposed changes and related matters.

Tashmoo is in need of its own Management Plan. The significant increase in anchoring throughout the pond during the past two summers has become a source of concern because of potential damage to eelgrass, and the necessity for the harbor-master to patrol, maintain order, and provide pump-out service.

There is increasing pressure to allow expanded commercial uses in Tashmoo. The Select Board recently approved five permanent mooring locations (allowing two moorings for each) for the commercial conch fishermen who have been using rafts to store traps on the west side of the pond. The Board also recently approved two more moorings for Tashmoo Boatyard on the east side for rental purposes.

Water quality in Tashmoo is also an issue. The southern head of Tashmoo has been closed to shell fishing for two decades due to high levels of fecal coliform, likely attributable to both storm water runoff and an increasing number of geese. The closed area was expanded northward two years ago, indicating that the problem is spreading.

Last fall TWI collected samples of stormwater runoff from West Spring Street and had them analyzed. Levels of fecal coliform were very high. We are currently collecting more samples during rain events to see if results are consistent. (See more details in the article on bacterial pollution later in this newsletter.)

The Waterways Committee is meeting at least monthly. Notice of meetings can be found on the Town website. We urge those with concerns about the health and environmental well-being of Tashmoo and the other town waterways to stay abreast of the Committee's work and share your concerns.



TOO MANY BOATS!

Many have noted the dramatic increase in boats anchoring in Lake Tashmoo. The pair of drone photos above dramatically captures the contrast in the anchoring area west of the channel entrance between July 2020 (left, from Will White, included in our Winter 2020 newsletter) and December 2020 (right, from Denys Wortman). Many of these boats raft together and spend the whole day on a Saturday or Sunday – many without onboard heads.

Beyond the noise and congestion caused by this influx of visitors, precious eelgrass beds are threatened by dragging anchors, water quality suffers from spillages from onboard heads or from boaters on vessels with no heads, and increased boat density has caused closure of valuable

shell fishing areas. (See the notice on the Town website entitled “Tashmoo – Reclassification/Redefinition.” <https://tisburyma.gov/shellfish>.) The Town spends thousands in taxpayer dollars to address water quality in the lake. Unfortunately, these visitors contribute nothing to the cost of these efforts.

TWI believes that the Town must have a management plan that would better control the proliferation of moorings and the size and location of anchoring areas, evaluate and address pollution sources, and protect eelgrass beds. Lake Tashmoo sits amongst very pleasant residential areas. We need to protect it from the impacts of visiting boaters and commercial interests.

Too Much Bacteria!

The south end of Lake Tashmoo is closed year-round to shell fishing by the Mass Department of Marine Fisheries (DMF). In a meeting with the TWI Board this Spring, DMF staff noted that they have a substantial history of data showing high levels of fecal coliform bacteria at the head of Tashmoo. Therefore, they no longer test there frequently.

TWI recognizes that there is no overnight fix for Tashmoo's high bacteria levels. However, we are not satisfied with an assumption of bacterial pollution. We would like to establish the source of this pollution and work with the



Town to address it.

One potential source is storm water runoff from a drainage system that runs from Tisbury School down West Spring Street, with an outfall

spilling into the head of Tashmoo. As described in past newsletters, Dr. James Porter led a TWI-sponsored effort

in 1996-1997, collaborating with the Town to install 12 "first-flush" basins along W. Spring. Data after installation showed that these first-flush basins effectively removed

fecal coliform and other pollutants from the storm water. Unfortunately, this system does not appear to have been well-maintained by the Town, though some remediation work was performed this winter. Robert Landreth is spear-



caption here

heading TWI efforts to collect water samples from this outfall, and areas in the Lake that it empties into, and testing them for fecal coliform levels.

A second possible source of high fecal coliform levels is the flocks of geese that congregate on Tashmoo Spring Pond and portions of the Lake itself. We are evaluating PCR testing that will establish the species of origin for the bacteria, e.g., humans, dogs, or geese. If the geese are the primary issue, managing them will be no easy feat. Nonetheless, TWI has looked into possible ways, suggested by the US Department of Agriculture, of addressing the goose population.

Too Much Nitrogen!

Past editions of the TWI newsletter have addressed the Town's efforts to reduce nitrogen pollution in Lake Tashmoo. High levels of nitrogen, mostly in the form of nitrates, can lead to eutrophication, killing animal life, and recently, have also been associated with dangerous cyanobacteria (harmful algae) blooms.

The Tisbury Board of Health has been a leader within the Commonwealth in addressing nitrogen pollution from septic systems, which accounts for roughly 80% of the controllable nitrogen flowing into Lake Tashmoo. TWI's support for enhanced denitrification septic systems has paid dividends in identifying new technologies that reduce nitrogen output to levels comparable to expensive sewer systems.

For many years, TWI has supported a summer internship at the Martha's Vineyard Commission to collect water samples in Tashmoo. Sheri Caseau and Chris Seidel from the Commission have recently set up a new website that interested persons can use to learn more about the Commission's water testing program. (Search the internet for "MVC Ponds of the Vineyard Story Map.")

Scroll through this hugely valuable "Story Map" to see descriptions of Vineyard ponds and their pollution concerns, how and why the MVC collects water samples every year, and to review data for various sampling sites. More data will be added over time.



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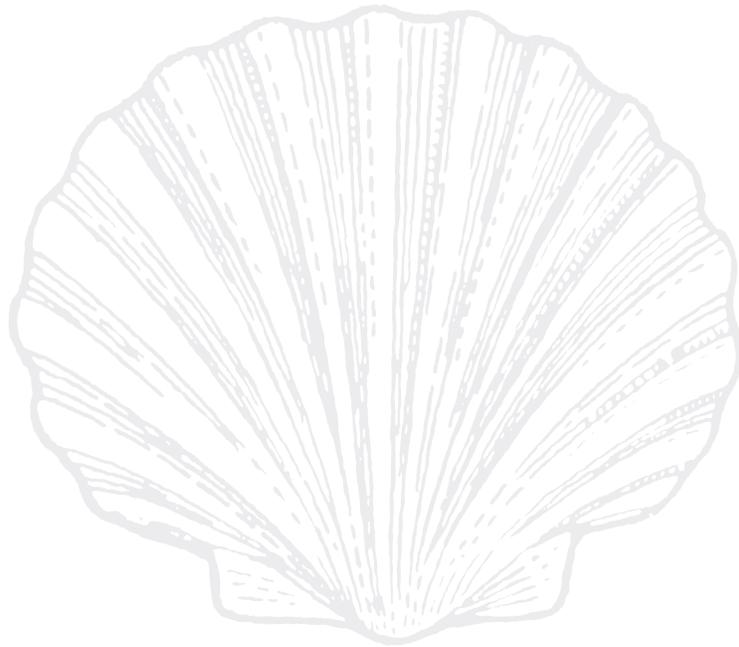
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MISSION STATEMENT Tisbury Waterways Incorporated (TWI) is a citizens' non-profit organization whose mission is to provide a community presence in matters involving the quality and improvement of waterways in the Town of Tisbury. TWI acts as an advocate and catalyst to enlist the active participation of the public in support of municipal, educational and research programs designed to improve local marine water quality.

Visit our Website: www.tisburywaterways.org



2021 TWI Environmental Science Scholarship



Justine Cassel of Vineyard Haven has been chosen as the 2021 TWI Environmental Science Scholarship recipient. The scholarship is given in memory of some of the early members of Tisbury Waterways who were especially interested in education, including Betty Feldman, Jo Wood, and June Kapell. Through the support of TWI donors, the scholarship stipend was increased this year to \$2000.

Justine is a graduate of Martha's Vineyard Regional High School and is now a student at University of New Hampshire (UNH), where she is majoring in Marine, Estuary, and

Save the Date

Welcome back! You are invited to attend the Annual TWI Seafood Cocktail Party. Enjoy a spectacular view overlooking the Lagoon and Harbor. Please save the date of **Sunday, August 22ND, 5-7 p.m.** and join us for a happy reunion of members and guests of TWI and learn about our 2021 initiatives, including our concerns about Tashmoo. RSVP at info@tisburywaterways.org to reserve your tickets at \$50 per person.

We've missed you!

Freshwater Biology. Justine has interned for several environmental organizations on Martha's Vineyard, including the Great Pond Foundation, Friends of Sengekontacket, the Martha's Vineyard Shellfish Group, and the Oak Bluffs Shellfish Department.

This summer, Justine is working on a UNH sponsored project involving cyanobacteria, under the guidance of the Martha's Vineyard Commission Water Resource Planner, Sheri Caseau. In addition to studying cyanobacteria toxin levels, including those in Lake Tashmoo, Justine will also be initiating a citizen science project to train volunteers to monitor ponds to predict blooms, using the "Bloom Watch" program in use on Cape Cod.