

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT WORK GROUP SUMMARY RECREATION SUB-TOPIC DRAFT 2/2/7

MISSION *what the Work Group is doing*

The mission of the Natural Environment Work Group is to identify community needs and desires for use of and enjoyment of natural lands and waters; to articulate a vision for the future of nature on the Vineyard, a future that keeps viable for future generations those remarkable resources which uniquely nurture and inspire inhabitants and visitors; and to achieve consensus on strategies to best arrive at that vision.

OVERALL PURPOSE *what we hope to achieve for Recreation on the Vineyard*

A vision for recreation should encourage enjoyment of natural lands and waters in a manner that respects scenic values, biodiversity and the rights of others to use and enjoy the same resources, and should maintain the same or better ability for future generations to do the same.

1. Residents and visitors should have access to the Vineyard's beaches and shoreline for a variety of recreational activities, **including swimming, fishing and walking**, in a diverse array of settings.

2. Residents and visitors should enjoy a diverse experience of walking and cycling trails, with cross connections.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Outdoor recreation is an integral part of Vineyard life and Island character. The ability to stroll or cycle or fish is important anywhere, but the Vineyard's natural beauty and evocative landscapes and vistas bring a special restorative quality to respite from the labors and cares of the built environment.

Access to and enjoyment of natural areas provides community benefits beyond those to the individual; access inspires proprietorship which in turn inspires proper stewardship.

Unfortunately, in spite of the apparent bounty, there is only limited access to much of the most desirable land and water areas, particularly at the shoreline. Where there is access, there are often conflicts among the various users, or conflicts with management of

the resources. User fees may keep some areas inaccessible to those with lesser means.

While there has been some coast and beach acquisition for the public in recent years,

there is a perceived trend for reduction in free and easy access that was previously

enjoyed. There are no data to support or refute this perceived trend.

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Goal #1 Residents and visitors should have appropriate access to the Vineyard's beaches and shoreline for a variety of recreational activities in a diverse array of settings. **These activities include fishing, shellfishing, walking, sitting and swimming.**

Status

- Of the 38.8% of the coast that is public, 37.5% is open to the general public and 1.2% to town residents only¹.

- Of the 47 miles of barrier beach, that is the wide, sandy beach that most think of for

beach-going, 33 miles are private and 14 are public².

Objective Identify and secure appropriate access nodes for increased point access.

Increase alongshore access where appropriate, ideally every 5 miles.

Obstacles

- The regulatory climate in Massachusetts tends to favor the shoreline owners' and

waterways abutters' rights over those of the general public.

- Linear shoreline is a finite resource with correspondingly high cost of acquisition.

Goal #2 Residents and visitors should enjoy a diverse experience of walking and cycling trails, with cross connections.

Status (see map)

Objective There should be an **increase in length and number of trails and in connections among** the network of pedestrian and bicycle trails across the Vineyard.

Interdependencies Transportation

GOAL #3 Encourage landowners to allow access for those who would use the land

lightly and respect the property.

Status There is a perceived decline in the willingness of landowners to allow unrestricted

passage over their properties.

Objective Increase access opportunities for passage over private properties for recreation. **This includes deer hunting where appropriate as well as passive use of trails.**

Strategy Outreach to landowners.

¹ 2005 unpublished MVC data

² 1994 unpublished MVC data

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EMERGING CONCEPTS

- Research Colonial Ordinances regarding ownership at the shoreline. - When Massachusetts adopted the Colonial Ordinances in the 1630's, generously ceding public rights at the waterfront in order to encourage development, the Vineyard was not part of the Commonwealth, and only became a part in 1692. Should the Vineyard fight to return to the same shoreline rights as New York State, where the public has more rights? **(POSSIBLE BOLD IDEA)**

- Plan for greenways, rather than trails. A greenway is a wider swath of undeveloped land, to be used for wildlife habitat and biodiversity, as well as for recreational trails.

(POSSIBLE BOLD IDEA)

PREVIOUSLY DISCUSSED IDEAS

- There was brief discussion of a possible strategy that whenever conservation restrictions are created, public access should be allowed. -- This idea is not being promoted because of difficulties of potential conflict with wildlife management and the potential for fewer owners to place the restrictions if public access were a necessary component.