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CLEAN WATER!

2026 SPRING NEWS

Deep Dives & Fresh Updates from the Nantucket Land & Water Council



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Dear Members & Friends,

Clean Water!

If I had to sum up the purpose of our organization in two words today, that is probably what I would say. As an organization we are immersed in many issues and we accomplish a lot. We often answer questions about how we pursue our mission to preserve the long-term health of Nantucket's environment and community by protecting our land and water resources with, *We Pay Attention; We Raise Awareness; We Take Action.* We have been employing these tactics—our primary trifecta—in pursuit of our mission for over 50 years, and today, the most urgent and critically important objective we have is to preserve the health of Nantucket's waters.



I would challenge anyone to articulate why protecting water quality on Nantucket is not essential to our community's long-term health. I really don't believe this can be questioned or challenged with any legitimacy. However, when we turn our attention to *How can we protect this precious, shared resource?* we enter a much more interesting discussion. It is widely understood and accepted that humans are the greatest threat to the quality of water in our communities. If we are going to protect our drinking water and the health of our harbors and ponds for our long term use and enjoyment we must recognize and acknowledge how our actions threaten our waters and what we can do to reduce our impact and improve our water quality wherever possible.

As the great writer and poet Wendell Berry tells us, *"The environment is not a place, it is a process. It is the air we breathe, the water we drink, the soil we walk on."*

The Nantucket Land & Water Council's work is also a process. It encompasses the interconnectedness of our actions and their impacts on the environment around us. Importantly, the impacts of our actions are cumulative. We must all wake up from the dream that our own footprint is too small to matter. The way that our public policies and regulations allow us to develop and manage our individual properties, and the ways that we choose to do so adds up to and directly impacts the health of our water. We cannot treat our environmental protections as mere suggestions to be negotiated away. We must recognize that the long-term health of our water, as well as of our community and economy, depends entirely on our collective willingness to respect the guardrails designed to protect this special place that is our haven and our home.

This is the reason the NLWC attends Planning, Zoning, Conservation Commission, Select Board, and Board of Health meetings day in and day out, and why you will hear us stand up to comment or bring in expert consultants to help our Boards review complex projects and interpret regulations. In the last ten years alone, we have reviewed thousands of permit applications. We look at each and every one the same way we look at every proposed change in our bylaws or zoning regulations: through a singular lens: how will allowing or enacting this change impact our vitally important natural resources in the long term? By holding the line against pressure to bypass our environmental standards, and working collaboratively to propose improved standards, we ensure that the "process" of development does not come at the expense of our waters. We are here to ensure that the cumulative result of these decisions preserves, rather than depletes, the Nantucket we all cherish.

Wendell Berry has also said, *"The world is no better than its places. Its places at last are no better than their people while their people continue in them."* I invite you to join us in our work to take care of our place and of our water.

With gratitude,

Emily Molden

Emily Molden
Executive Director



Short-Term Rentals and Environmental Stewardship—A 2025 Town Meeting Recap

Throughout 2025, the **NLWC worked tirelessly to balance regulations around use of Short-Term Rentals (STRs) with the protection of Nantucket's fragile ecosystem.** Alongside legal and land-use experts, we analyzed various proposals to provide recommendations to voters ahead of the **May Annual Town Meeting (ATM) and November Special Town Meeting (STM).**

While our **collaborative efforts successfully defeated a "by-right" STR measure in May,** the tide **shifted during the November STM.** Despite an alternative proposal developed with Planning Board Director Dave Iverson—which sought to memorialize rental rights while establishing essential environmental safeguards—**voters passed a measure codifying STRs across all residential districts without meaningful restrictions.** This outcome was largely driven by widespread, though **misplaced, concerns regarding the loss of perceived property rights.**

As the implications of the November vote continue to unfold, and as **local reporting highlights gaps and**

regulatory challenges, it is evident that additional STR policy refinement is necessary. All policies and practices related to growth, development, land use, and resource management require careful evaluation for their impact on shared natural resources. Questions about STRs are inherently connected to broader concerns about **growth and development which impact nutrient pollution, drinking water protection, PFAS contamination, wastewater capacity, stormwater management, and water conservation.** Land use decisions shape environmental outcomes.

While perspectives on STR policy vary across the community, **the shared goal of protecting Nantucket's unique character and natural resources endures.** Continued dialogue and thoughtful policymaking are essential to ensuring that future growth reflects both community needs and the ecological limits of this fragile island environment.



Geotubes: Deficient in Sand & Lacking Critical Documentation

Since 2015, the Sconset geotube installation has failed to meet its permit mitigation requirements, resulting in **a deficit of 120,000 cubic feet of sand missing from Nantucket's coastal system.** Despite this, in early 2025, the **Nantucket Conservation Commission approved a three-fold expansion of the project** and granted an **additional decade to resolve the sand deficit.**

In response, the Nantucket Land & Water Council (NLWC) and local residents filed for a Superseding Order of Conditions (SOC) with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP). The SOC filing triggered a requirement for the project proponents to submit documentation to the **Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Office.** While the MEPA office recently approved the project's change without requiring further environmental studies, it **noted that significant unresolved issues must be addressed during the permitting phase.**

The MassDEP issued correspondence to the project applicants, SBPF and the Town of Nantucket, identifying 18 critical deficiencies in the project. To avoid a denial, **applicants must now provide additional information including updated site plans, missing beach monitoring data** (uncollected since 2022), a **sediment transport study,** and a **credible plan to remediate the mounting sand deficit.**

Beyond state permitting and ongoing litigation, the project requires a license approval at Town Meeting (Article 73). The NLWC maintains that **it is inappropriate for the community to vote on a license for a non-compliant project** on public land before state environmental agencies have completed a thorough review.

ADVOCACY NEWS

Artificial Turf Discussion Highlights Importance of Protecting Nantucket's Aquifer

In recent months, the proposed installation of an artificial turf field and track at Nantucket High School's Capizzo Stadium has generated significant discussion across the island. **Because the site is located within a Zone II wellhead recharge area**, the proposal has prompted questions about **potential impacts to Nantucket's sole source aquifer and long-term water quality**.

As part of its mission to safeguard Nantucket's land and water resources, the **Nantucket Land and Water Council** has been closely engaging in the conversation and **working to ensure that the Board of Health and the public have access to the best available scientific information**.

Earlier this winter, NLWC assisted the Board of Health in **coordinating presentations by independent experts** and our consultants at the Horsely Witten group for a special Board of Health meeting. These scientists provided context on **how compounds like PFAS and other potential contaminants** associated with artificial turf move through the environment, how they are tested, and what is currently known and still uncertain about their **presence in synthetic materials and stormwater systems**.

Our goal throughout this process has been to help ensure that the conversation remains grounded in science and that decision-makers have the information needed to evaluate potential risks to Nantucket's drinking water. In addition to convening experts to give their opinions to the Board of Health, the NLWC submitted comment letters with recommendations on requirements we'd like to see conditioned to this project that would help to at least ensure that risk was minimized to the best of our current ability.

While PFAS are now known to be widespread in many consumer products and environments, the discussion has underscored the importance of **carefully evaluating new, long-lived infrastructure in areas that directly recharge the island's aquifer**, including consideration of other potential contaminants, stormwater dynamics, and the long-term breakdown and transport of synthetic materials. Nantucket has long taken a proactive approach to protecting its groundwater and drinking water supply, and that history continues to guide us in our perspective on how new proposals in sensitive recharge areas should be evaluated.

NLWC will remain engaged in the process and committed to providing constructive, science-based input as the conversation moves forward.

RESEARCH NEWS

NLWC's Eelgrass-Friendly Moorings Initiative is Moving Forward!

Healthy eelgrass is essential to the vitality of Nantucket Harbor. **Eelgrass meadows provide critical habitat** for wild bay scallops and juvenile fish, **improve water quality** by **filtering polluted runoff, absorb excess nutrients, store carbon**, and **stabilize shorelines** against erosion and storm surge. Yet eelgrass in Nantucket Harbor has declined significantly in recent decades due to nutrient pollution, warming waters, and physical disturbance—including abrasion from traditional boat moorings.

Since 2018, NLWC has worked with Harbormaster Sheila Lucey and her team, the Town of Nantucket and island partners on eelgrass restoration initiatives aimed at reversing this decline. One of the most practical and immediate solutions is **transitioning conventional chain**

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RESEARCH NEWS

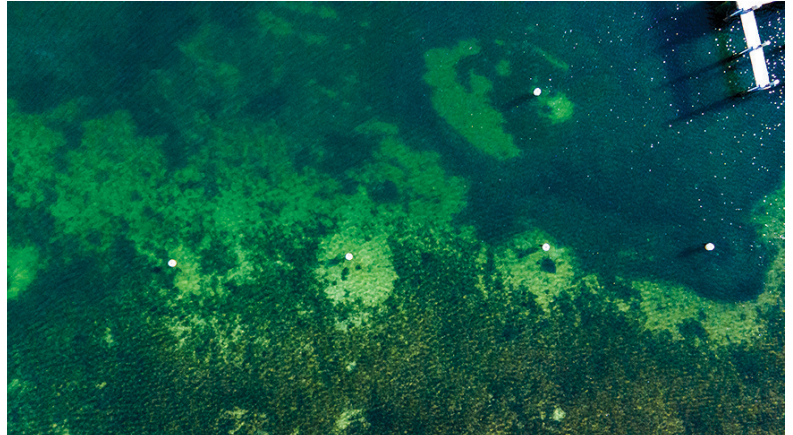
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moorings to eelgrass-friendly systems—a key recommendation of the newly adopted Nantucket Eelgrass Management Plan. In 2022, **NLWC partnered with Nantucket Harbormaster Sheila Lucey and Anderson Stillwater Moorings** to design and implement an environmentally sensitive mooring system adapted for Nantucket's unique needs.

The NLWC Waterkeeper vessel has been successfully secured using this new conservation mooring system for three consecutive seasons. **Thanks to generous funding** recently awarded to further this project **by the Great Harbor Yacht Club Foundation**, NLWC and the Harbormaster's Office will now launch a pilot program this spring. In partnership with local mooring companies, Anderson's Stillwater Moorings and Nantucket Moorings, **NLWC will transition up to 25 conventional moorings to eelgrass-friendly systems** and monitor the pilot sites to measure eelgrass recovery and seabed stability, with the goal of informing future harbor management decisions and expanding the program if successful.

The beauty of eelgrass-friendly moorings is that they solve a problem without restricting boating. This project shows conservation and harbor use can work together for the betterment of our environment and to the benefit of our community, and we hope it becomes a model for broader adoption.

– RJ Turcotte, Nantucket Waterkeeper



The Nantucket Land & Water Council extends its **sincere appreciation to the Great Harbor Yacht Club Foundation** for their foresight, vision, and generous **support for innovative solutions** that **protect the island's land and water** through science, advocacy, and community engagement.

EDUCATION NEWS



Makin' a Splash with the 8th Grade!

This month, Nantucket Waterkeeper RJ Turcotte brought the ponds to Ms. Arnold's 8th-grade Environmental Science students for them to investigate. As a part of a newly formatted lesson developed with Sonia Scherr of Egan Maritime, the students learned about water quality, and how to use our most common analytical tools. Then we gave them each a sample to test. The water was from a Nantucket pond, collected that very morning, and the students were challenged to be scientific detectives and use the data they collected to identify which pond it came from. On Tuesday, it was Long Pond, and on Wednesday, it was Sesachacha. The lessons were very hands-on, splashy, and a ton of fun! A special thank you to Cyrus Peirce Middle School and Egan Maritime for inviting us again this year!

EDUCATION NEWS

Native Plant Roundtable Advances *Grow Native for Nantucket*

Earlier this winter, the Nantucket Land and Water Council convened a **Native Plant Roundtable** as part of our *Grow Native for Nantucket* initiative, bringing together local landscapers, designers, growers, and conservation partners to discuss how we can expand the use of native plants across the island. The conversation was held in collaboration with the Nantucket Conservation Foundation and Surfing Hydrangea.

The roundtable created space for participants to share on-the-ground perspectives about both the opportunities and challenges involved in shifting toward more native planting. **Topics ranged from plant availability and sourcing to client education, maintenance expectations, and regulatory considerations.** Participants also discussed ways to better support homeowners, contractors, and municipal projects interested in incorporating native species into their landscapes.

A central theme that emerged was the importance of **collaboration across the landscaping and conservation communities.** By strengthening connections between growers, designers, contractors, and advocacy organizations, native plants can become more accessible, practical, and widely adopted on Nantucket.

The roundtable is one piece of NLWC's broader **Grow Native for Nantucket** effort, which works to promote landscaping practices that protect the island's water resources and support local biodiversity. Through workshops, partnerships with landscape professionals, and demonstration gardens, NLWC is continuing to build momentum around native plant use across the island.

Convening conversations like this roundtable helps ensure that the transition toward more ecological landscaping is both practical and collaborative. We look forward to continuing the dialogue and working together to *Grow Native for Nantucket*.



SPRING LANDSCAPING TIP: No Mow May

NO MOW MAY

As spring arrives on Nantucket, join the NLWC and the Nantucket Garden Club and consider giving your lawn a short break from mowing. **No Mow May** encourages homeowners to delay mowing during the early part of the growing season, allowing flowering plants like clover and dandelions to bloom and provide an important food source for emerging pollinators.

Even small changes in lawn care can make a meaningful difference. Letting your lawn grow a bit longer early in the season helps support bees and other beneficial insects while reducing fuel use and lawn maintenance.

If a full month feels like too much, consider setting aside a small area of your yard to grow freely or mowing less frequently. These simple steps can help create a more water and pollinator-friendly landscape as the island moves into the growing season.

Visit nantucketlandwater.org to learn more.

Clean Water Classic

Let's Go for H2O!

Registration for the CLEAN WATER CLASSIC is OPEN!

This one-mile **community paddle event** to benefit the NLWC Water Fund will be held on Nantucket Harbor on **Saturday, June 6, 2026!**

Refreshments Provided • No Vessel, No Problem! • Prizes Awarded

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!

Galley Beach • PURE Insurance • White Elephant Resorts
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For more information visit nantucketlandwater.org/clean-water-classic



Invest in Nantucket's Future!

Through our **Community Education & Annual Business Sponsorship** program, businesses that care deeply about the health of the Nantucket environment and community provide support for the NLWC's ongoing advocacy and community education.

These contributions aid us all year long as we **Pay Attention, Raise Awareness, and Take Action** on behalf of Nantucket's precious natural resources.

Sponsorship levels range from \$500-\$10,000.



Thank You to Our 2026 Community Education & Annual Business Sponsors!

Silvercrest Asset Management Group

**Anderson's Stillwater Moorings • Grassroots Gardens • Nantucket Engineering
Nantucket Marine • September Productions • Surfing Hydrangea Nursery • Yoho Raw Bar**

*For more information on 2026 Sponsorship Opportunities, contact our
Director of Advancement, Michelle Whelan at michelle@nantucketlandwater.org or 508-228-2818.*

NANTUCKET LAND & WATER COUNCIL

CLEAN WATER!

2026 SPRING NEWS

PO Box 502, Nantucket, MA 02554
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SAVE *the* Dates

Monday, May 4

Nantucket Annual Town Meeting

Saturday, June 6

Clean Water Classic

Thursday, July 2

NLWC & Almanack Arts Colony—Friends Fête

Tuesday, July 14

NLWC State of the Harbor Forum

Tuesday, August 4

NLWC Annual Meeting

Sunday, August 30

NLWC Annual “End of Season” Dinner

MISSION

The Nantucket Land & Water Council is a 501(c)(3) non-profit **dedicated to preserving the health of Nantucket’s environment and community** through the protection of the island’s land and water resources.

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Become a member today!

