

February 22, 2012

Greetings,

Our names are Wendy Weldon and Leanne Cowley, co-chairs of the Squibnocket Pond District Advisory Committee (SPDAC). SPDAC is a town committee comprised of Chilmark residents and representatives of various Chilmark Town Boards and Committees, the Martha's Vineyard Commission, Martha's Vineyard Shellfish Group, and the Natural Resources Department of the Wampanoag Tribe, Aquinnah.

We are writing to ask for your TAX-DEDUCTIBLE support for a town initiative that may be critical to the future health of our island ponds. With apologies for the length, we ask that you read this entire letter carefully.

The Background

You may be aware of the Massachusetts Estuaries Project (MEP), a scientific study of 89 estuaries and ponds in Southeastern Massachusetts, including the Cape and Islands. The study is a cooperative effort of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the UMass Dartmouth School of Marine Science and Technology (SMASST). Its goal is to provide an intensive review of the environmental impacts to our coastal ponds and their watersheds. Each pond's study is a "snapshot" of water quality, hydrodynamics, and nutrient loading – a baseline report with which to effectively and efficiently manage the resources. The MEP is tackling each pond or estuary in turn.

Now it is the Vineyard's turn. MEP studies have already been completed on Edgartown Great Pond, Sengekontacket Pond, and Farm Pond. Tisbury Great Pond is in progress. The pond system of Squibnocket, Menemsha, Quitsa and Stonewall is next in line to study as a group. However, funding still has to be approved by the Town of Chilmark, and there is some question whether the project will be accepted, due to the cost.

Funding for MEP

Each project study is subsidized by state funding that allows communities to undertake the evaluation for about 40% of the actual cost. For the study of the Squibnocket, Menemsha, Quitsa and Stonewall Ponds system, the towns of Chilmark, Aquinnah, and the Wampanoag Tribe have been apportioned equal shares of the community contribution. Chilmark's portion is \$31,767 – a large undertaking for the already-stressed budget.

However, the study is a critically important opportunity that we cannot afford to pass up. Citizen contributions have been very successful in getting MEP studies off the ground. As an example, the Chilmark Pond study requires \$54,000 from the town. The pond residents have raised nearly half of that.

The Blacksmith Valley Association has pledged \$1,500 so far towards the MEP for our pond system. Other individual donations have already been received, bringing the total donations thus far close to \$5,000. I am asking you to step up for our ponds as well, hoping that each of you will be very generous in your financial support of this extremely important project.

At the Chilmark Board of Selectmen's meeting on January 18 the Selectmen voted unanimously to put the Massachusetts Estuary Project on the Chilmark Town Warrant for the annual Chilmark Town Meeting on April 23, as well as on the town election ballot two days after the town meeting. It is important to note that the article must pass on both the town meeting floor *and* on the town election ballot.

Any funds that we can raise in support of the MEP study by April 1 will defray expenses to the Town of Chilmark, and will make the voters more likely to support it as well.

Existing Support for the MEP Study

The Massachusetts Estuaries Project has the support of the Martha's Vineyard Commission. The Chilmark Board of Selectmen voted to put it on the warrant and the town Finance Committee recommended the MEP study. Island scientists support it as well; they believe that nutrient overloads -- of nitrogen in particular -- are the biggest threat to the health and integrity of our ponds. Loss of eelgrass beds and shellfish are just some of the cascading effects. (See *The Island Blue Book* for more information on this; copies may be found at the Chilmark Library and town offices.)

Rick Karney, head of the MV Shellfish Group, points out that the MEP study is specifically designed to identify the sources of nutrient inputs and provide management options and strategies to help reduce the nutrient over-enrichment and save the ponds from degradation.

Isaiah Scheffer, our Chilmark Shellfish Constable, also fully supports the pond system study. He mentions that there was a serious algae bloom in the winter of both 2009 and 2010 in Nashaquitsa Pond that caused 1/2 million bay scallops to die. This winter there was another algae bloom but fortunately he was able to save the shellfish by scraping off the algae. The algae blooms are not a natural occurrence and are a sign that Quitsa pond is suffering from an overabundance of nitrogen.

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Why Should You Support the MEP?

Why do we need the MEP for Squibnocket, Menemsha, Quitsa and Stonewall ponds? **To protect the resource we have come to love and to protect the investment we love to have.** In order to protect and restore, we need to understand. The data gathered from this study will be used for strategic planning and management decisions. It will show us where we are in each pond's ecological health, and give us the tools to manage where we are headed. Protecting water quality and watersheds is imperative for our quality of life now and in the future. Equally important is the value of our land and home investments.

It is clear that without our beautiful healthy ponds, life here in Chilmark would be very different. We count on the water being clean and the fish and shellfish being abundant. We sail, we row, we paddle, we swim, we go boating and we spend countless hours looking out at our beautiful ponds. But, continuing development and redevelopment does put them in jeopardy. Each of our ponds have different problems to solve and the MEP study will address all of the issues in each pond.

To give you more background on how the study works, here is a link to the MEP website: <http://www.oceanscience.net/estuaries/about.htm>. It includes a list of projects completed, in progress, or planned. You also can download completed reports.

In Summary

Without generous homeowner support, we may not convince the town voters that they should vote in favor of Chilmark's participation in the MEP study. **And remember, your donations are 100% tax-deductible and need to be received by April 1, 2012.**

Please email Wendy at wendyweldon@mac.com with the amount you are sending to help fund the MEP. **Then, please write your checks out to The Town of Chilmark-MEP FUND and send them to Melanie Becker, Town Treasurer, Town of Chilmark, PO Box 119, 401 Middle Road, Chilmark, MA 02535-0119.** The checks will be deposited on April 26th if the MEP is passed on the town floor as well as on the Chilmark Town Election ballot. If it does not pass, your donation will be returned. (Please be sure to have a return address on your envelope and/or on your check.)

Thank you for supporting the MEP and the ongoing health of our ponds.

Sincerely yours, ▾

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Wendy Weldon and Leanne Cowley

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Co-Chairs, Squibnocket Pond District Advisory Committee

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