

Sustainability Action Plan

Created by twenty young people
who came together from eight Cape Cod schools
the weekend of October 24, 2003 for the
Sustainability Youth Action Summit
at the Eastham Coast Guard Station.



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The Cape & Islands Youth Council on Sustainability is a youth-led organization open to middle and high school students from Cape Cod and the Islands. The Youth Council was created *by* young people... to give young people a voice in their own community.

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Introduction

Sustainability is a state in which the human community exists without upsetting the balance of the natural world around us, guaranteeing its continued existence.

Currently, a growing population, poor waste management, erosion, inefficient use of energy and water, a lack of public transportation, water and air pollution are just a few of the many contributing factors posing a dangerous threat to the continued good health of the ecosystems and society of the Cape and Islands.

The Youth Council's goal is to guide the Cape towards true sustainability through education, and the implementation of the following action plan. This is a cause relevant to all Cape residents and therefore we welcome the help, ideas, and support of all who love and live in this beautiful community.

It is crucial that we appreciate the delicate relationship between the human community and the natural world in which we live. As residents of Cape Cod, we are acutely aware of the direct effects that our behaviors have upon our environment. We must utilize this awareness and transform it into positive action. We must overcome the natural inertia inhibiting change if we wish to preserve Cape Cod's beauty for future generations.

The enormity of our task may initially seem like an immovable boulder on the beach. Yet the relentless ocean causes the rock to move slowly out to sea, one grain of sand at a time. Here, in this compilation of ideas and actions, we stand before you as the tide of change. We call out to each and every one of you to join us.

Green Tourism

Living in a community where many individuals and families rely heavily on a healthy tourism industry, it is especially important to incorporate environmental awareness into any kind of Cape sustainability Action Plan. For instance, many visitors are not aware of the fragility of the Cape's ecosystem. A horseshoe crab meandering slowly under the water could be greatly damaged if a curious child decided to pick it up by the tail. If that same child could be taught about the importance and delicacy of these prehistoric creatures, the child would be able to observe and learn while leaving the crab unharmed. In addition to our local wildlife, many of our natural resources are strained due to the large influx of our seasonal guests. In order to reduce the strain on the Cape's unique natural community, it is necessary that we as individuals, and as communities, act together in order to inform, educate, and preserve those natural wonders, which attract the many thousands of visitors who flock to the Cape each year. The following are our proposed action steps:

Individual:

- Support local green hotels (encourage friends and family to stay there too!). Many hotels and motels are attempting to be more environmentally conscientious by reducing water use and waste production. Please encourage these establishments by giving them your support.
- When visiting a hotel, reuse your towels. This saves a great deal of water and also reduces the amount of detergents that flow into the water table.
- If you are staying at a local hotel that could be more environmentally conscientious- talk to the manager. Show your support for Green Hotels by asking if they would be willing to look at an information packet.

Community:

- Educate tourists by:
 - distributing information about the Cape's unique environment at local town halls and tourist information centers.
 - publicizing educational events such as talks and lectures taking place at local libraries and organizations such as the National Seashore and the Eastham Visitor's center.
- Create a Community Ranking Rubric for local Green Hotels. Establish specific criteria for "greenness".
 - Ranking system can be publicized on hotel web sites in order to encourage patrons.
- Design a pamphlet educating people about green hotels and the ranking system. Include free listings for particularly environmentally sound hotels.

Council:

- Produce public service announcements to be heard over the radio, read in local papers, and viewed on the local television channel.
 - Announce local lectures and information sessions.
 - Advertise for environmental activities such as Coast Sweep and beach grass plantings.
 - Promote awareness through friendly facts and reminders such as, "Did you know that beach grass reduces beach erosion? Please enjoy our beaches but stay off the dunes."

Water Issues

It's what we use to brush our teeth, bathe, and drink. But rarely do we consider that many of our everyday rituals are affecting the quality and quantity of our water supply. By reducing the amount of precious water we use, or simply picking up after our pets, we will be on our way to having a clean water supply for future generations. Here are some ways that you can help.

Individual:

- Help the issue of eutrophication by using natural dish washing soaps.
- Pick up your pet's waste to keep it out of our water.
- Go to your town water board and get tests done on your water to make sure it is high quality.
- Use lower pressure water, heads, which conserve water, use and save money.
- At hotels, tell them that you do not want your towels to be washed every day because it is not necessary and wastes water.
- Write to school boards asking for improvements in the way they use water.
- We understand that it nice to take a long, hot shower in the morning, but try to take shorter showers.
- Try not to keep the dishwasher on as much.
- Don't leave the water running while brushing your teeth.
- Don't water your lawns 24/7; it is a tremendous waste of water.
- Use Seventh Generation products or other green items (products such as laundry detergent and dish washing soap) can be found on Cape.

Community:

- Monitor water quality in ponds and estuaries in order to determine how the community can improve water quality.

Council:

- Encourage more grocery stores to sell Seventh Generation and Earth Friendly products on their shelves.
- Encourage the public to use drought resistant grass seed.

Habitat Management

Take a look at any map of Cape Cod, and you will immediately understand the importance of habitat and land management. The Cape is a relatively slender peninsula arcing gently into the Atlantic Ocean. Consequently, an impressive collection of habitats, including wetlands, grasslands, saltwater marsh, freshwater ponds, marine and forest lands, combines to create the whole of the Cape. Unfortunately, the delicate balance intertwining these habitats is being threatened by overpopulation and massive increases in construction.

Unfortunately, many of the areas that are marveled at because of their beauty are rapidly declining due to people's lack of environmental awareness. 44% of the land on the Cape is developed, 39% protected, and 17% remains available for potential development. Between 1971 and 1990 24% of the forest on the Cape was lost (35,458 acres!). We need to work quickly in order to ensure the protection of Cape Cod's environment.

Individuals:

- Protect salt marshes by staying off of the dunes and marshland. Educate yourself and others on erosion. Educate yourself and share your ideas at town meetings.
- Use organic fertilizers rather than fertilizers with harmful chemicals on your lawn. Also consider planting indigenous plants and shrubs rather than maintaining a large lawn.
- Go to Coastsweep (trash clean-ups) or do your own beach clean up.
- Plant beach grass and trees with the National Park Service in order to help with habitats and erosion control.
- Help with Habitat for Humanity and help build homes for people.
- Learn about invasive species so you can remove them from your yard. Certify vernal pools in your area.
- Consider purchasing undeveloped land and donating it to your local land trust.
- Attend your Town Meetings and support legislation that would help purchase and protect empty space.
- Take walks in your local parks and enjoy the peace and beauty of natural habitats.

Community:

- Support controlled burns in order to remove invasive plants.
- Arrange beach clean-ups.
- Vernal Pool Certifications and other protection measures need to be enforced.
- Support Pathways projects to connect open space across the Cape for the benefit of humans and animals alike.
- Encourage Conservation Assessments for private properties.
- Prioritize available land plots based on those, which have the most natural value, and those which would be better used for affordable housing, etc.

Council:

- Work on educating people on the importance of friendly landscaping and alternatives to pesticides that are harmful to wildlife and water quality.

Human Community

Two years ago, there was a middle-aged man in Provincetown who had never been taught how to read. Without this skill, it was difficult for him to find employment, and as the years passed, he found it harder and harder to support his family. Two years ago there was also a mother in Brewster who had been privileged in her education and was a teacher at Barnstable High School. Learning of the man's predicament, she volunteered to teach him how to read. He learned quickly, and within months, he was literate. With his new skill, the Provincetown man was able to find a well-paying job and is now happily supporting his family. Community is very much about just this. It is about networking our skills, showing our compassion, learning from one another, listening, and lending our voices. Community is understanding that each individual makes a difference.

As Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Individual:

- Volunteer at local Habitat for Humanity programs.
- Volunteer to be a tutor.
- If you are a young person, volunteer at an elderly home or interview an elder about their life.
- If you are an adult, support local schools by attending drama or musical productions (even if you do not have a relative attending the school).
- Attend multi-cultural events.
- Volunteer to help with or organize an after school program.
- Attend and participate in town meetings.

Community:

- Promote multi-lingual pamphlets, signs, and other public information sources, with a particular emphasis on Portuguese to meet the needs of the Cape's growing Brazilian population.
- Encourage more schools to adopt peer mediation programs or incorporate these philosophies into health classes.
- Work to allocate funds for outdoors programs geared toward older teenagers.

Council:

- The Cape is primarily considered a retirement community. Yet, according to the 2000 census, 45,440 young people under 17 live on our peninsula. We have noticed that there is a lack of fun activities for the Cape Cod teens. The Juice Bar in Orleans was an attempt to remedy this problem, and we are sure that many other efforts have been made to meet this need as well. There are hundreds of cultural events that occur yearly on Cape Cod that young people would be interested in attending, yet these events are not targeted to our generation. WE want to know where they are, and when they are. We want to know what other efforts have been made. This is why we hope to develop a Cape Youth Network website devoted to providing Cape Cod's young people with valuable and practical information about their community and how they can take part in it.

Animal Community

Picture waking up early one morning. It's a fall day in Orleans and looking out your window, you see a squirrel and listen to the sounds of chickadees in the branches. Walking quickly to your car, you don't notice all the natural beauty that's surrounding you. One day, however, you suddenly notice that the wildlife has disappeared. You wonder what went wrong, only to realize too late the adverse consequences of our actions on the creatures living amongst us in our communities. If we continue our current habits, this will be our reality. Fortunately, it is not too late for us all to take action in order to ensure that the future of all creatures - great and small - is a bright one.

Individual:

- Purchase cruelty free products. (Lists of non-animal tested projects are available online).
- Avoid clothing made of animal pelts or skins.
- Take responsibility for your pets. They rely on your care and judgment to keep them safe. Make sure your cats are neutered and your pets are given the proper shots and vaccinations
- Be sure to keep wild animals in their natural habitats. Even taking a crab or snail home from the beach can threaten the well being of indigenous species.
- Volunteer your time at local animal shelters, or other animal rescue organizations.

Community:

- Encourage local grocery stores to carry free-range food products such as eggs, milk, and meat.
- Educate people about the local wildlife. This should include dispelling certain myths about animals like coyotes, as well as making people aware of the many endangered species living on Cape Cod.

Council:

- Work to educate the public about pet stores who support puppy mills and other cruel forms of raising animals.
- Encourage people to visit their local animal shelters or take advantage of other adoption programs.

Waste Management

Human waste is one of the most subtle forms of pollution that one can come across. For instance, seepage from your septic system can contaminate one's drinking water, the ocean we live beside and the ponds in which we enjoy recreational activities. This is one of the problems that accurate waste management can prevent.

Individual:

- Recycling is an effective way to make a change in your community. You can sort glass bottles, cans, paper and plastics and deliver them to a local recycling facility.
- Composting kitchen scraps such as vegetable, fruit peels, and other biodegradable non-cooked items are a great way to create fertilizer for your garden and minimize trips to the dump.
- Bring your own net or canvas tote bag to the grocery store instead of using paper or plastic bags.
- At home, reuse packaging, such as wrapping paper, Ziploc bags, and plastic Tupperware containers
- Buy products made from recycled materials. Common recycled products include benches, tables, and paper materials.
- Be conscious of yogurt containers, six-pack rings, cans and other debris that could be harmful to animals if left in their habitat.

Community:

- Involve your town in events like Coast sweep beach cleanup.
- Encourage local schools to practice recycling by educating the students through creative curriculum.
- Create school recycling programs.
- Publicize the negative affects of littering and bring awareness to local laws and regulations concerning waste management.

Council:

- The Cape Youth Council on Sustainability will take the necessary steps mentioned above.
- We will also work to bring awareness to these issues by educating individuals in our community.

Energy

What if tomorrow you could wake up to a world where energy flowed freely, coming from a never-ending, renewable source. We as individuals must gain the foresight to see *that* tomorrow, *today*. We not only need a source of renewable energy, but we must work to protect and conserve the supplies of energy we have left. Today, more than ever this action to conserve our nation's energy is at its most crucial stage. The U.S. uses and wastes more energy per person than any other nation in the world.

Individual:

- Use the car pool system to get to work, school and other places of interest in order to reduce traffic and car generated emissions.
- Turn off or dim your lights when they are not in use to conserve electricity and save money.
- Check and insulate water and heating pipes to prevent heat loss and energy consumption.
- During the winter months, put clear plastic over windows to better insulate your home.
- In warmer weather, hang clothes outside after the wash to save electricity by not using the dryer.
- Use your appliances wisely, and when purchasing new or used appliances look for the Energy Star label.
- Set your thermostats as low as possible to reduce excess gas or oil consumption.
- Use cold water for washing clothes and dishes to prevent wasting energy through the use of hot water heaters.
- Attend town meetings to encourage wise energy policies.
- Write to state government officials encouraging standards on energy efficient buildings.

Community:

- Promote fluorescent light bulbs by selling them as a school fundraiser.
- Work with local community leaders and the Massachusetts Transit Authority (MTA) to improve and publicize the public transportation system. In addition, write to the MTA and suggest additional stops at popular places.
- Encourage community members to attend town meetings and write to state governmental officials to create standards on energy efficient buildings.
- Promote and support the use of bio diesel and hybrid cars for personal and governmental use.

Council:

- Encourage schools to receive free energy audits to better manage their energy use and help them to save money.
- Gather a list of products certified by Energy Star (www.energystar.gov)
- Arrange for the Energy Trailer to come to schools and other community events to teach people about renewable energy sources.
- Provide a brochure to hardware stores to educate homebuilders and consumers on energy saving products and techniques.
- Distribute educational material on energy to appliance stores so that customers can make informed decisions.

Business

Environmental protection is not the roadblock to economic progress, but rather the key to long-term success. We must recognize that what is sustainable is often times more profitable as well. As a community, we can progress both economically and socially, but in a responsible fashion that meets the needs of the present without sacrificing the needs of the future.

Individual:

- Buy products produced or sold by locally owned businesses in order to support the Cape Cod economy. For example purchasing merchandise from local bookstores and farmer's markets.
- Vote with your dollar. Buy products that are produced in an environmentally sound fashion, such as organic fertilizers and phosphate-free detergents.

Community:

- Each year millions of styrofoam cups are thrown away increasing our waste management problems, yet travel mugs are for sale at almost every cafe. We propose that coffee shops or breakfast chains (i.e. Dunkin' Donuts) give a small discount to customers who bring in a travel mug, specific to that place of business, for coffee or tea refills. Not only would this reduce the amount of funds the business spends on styrofoam cups but also increase their sales of travel mugs, while reducing waste in the process.
- Another huge source of waste on Cape Cod is the thousands of plastic and paper grocery bags used by shoppers. We propose that local or chain grocery stores give discounts to customers who bring in their own tote bags to carry their products. This would be beneficial to the grocery store by reducing the huge amount of money spent yearly on bags.
- We also feel it is important to encourage businesses to recycle since this often times ends up being more profitable.
- Many bakeries are required by law to throw away all excess baked goods daily. However, as these products are entering the garbage, a family just a mile away may be struggling to put food on the table. We propose that bakeries follow in the footsteps of Panera Bread in Hyannis by donating their excess stock to local shelters, food pantries, or other needy parties.

Council:

- We plan to develop Sustainability Starter Kits that include "green" test products for Cape Codders to try at home and in their communities. These kits would include such products as energy saving light bulbs, passes on the Breeze bus line, 7th Generation laundry detergent samples, etc.

Conclusion

Stop for a moment. Allow yourself a brief hiatus from your daily life to acknowledge the richness of your surroundings. Finish reading these last few words and take a walk on the beach. Immerse yourself in the natural wonders of this place – fall in love. You see, in order to create change, one must have a certain amount of emotional involvement. Perhaps our apathy is merely a product of our familiarity. But really, this is what we are after: a place where humans and animals alike can live in harmony with one another. A place for all of us to call home.

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