



ENVIRONMENTAL LOOKOUT: LAUNCHING A NEW COLUMN

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As a new day dawns over Mashpee, the sun rises, illuminating our bays, estuaries, rivers, kettle ponds, bogs, and forests, highlighting our magnificent treasures. We call this portion of Cape Cod home, a piece of land uniquely formed 23,000 years ago by the Laurentide ice sheet's southernmost reach and its effects as it retreated, leaving behind the fragile landscape we enjoy today.

This land has enchanted, sustained, and entertained its inhabitants from the native peoples 12,000 years ago to today's increasingly diverse community.

The waters of Mashpee have helped sustain us with fish shellfish, and waterfowl. The land and bogs have given us quintessential American foods from cranberries to corn.

This environment has become an economic engine producing explosive development and growth of the population. Year-round residents numbered 3700 in 1980; by 2010, that number had risen to over 14,000, swelling even more in the summer to approximately 36,000 residents and visitors. This explosive growth has confirmed the appeal of Mashpee and provided the source of the fulfilling way of life within a sustainable, supportive community.

Yet this growth has also accelerated the degradation of our natural environment. The trouble lies beneath the serene surfaces of the waters and land. The issues are diverse and challenging. The most pressing is the nitrogen pollution of the salt waters and phosphorus pollution of the fresh waters, leading to noxious and toxic algae blooms killing vital aquatic plants, which threaten our fish and shellfish population's viability and foul the air with putrid odors. The proximate causes are septic systems effluent, stormwater runoff, and excessive fertilizer use. The land is also compromised by the polluting effects of trash and chemical contamination leaching into the soil and from there into precious aquifers, the source of our drinking water. The state has identified Popponesset Bay as the most nitrogen polluted body of saltwater in southeast Massachusetts.

As signs of degradation of our environment became more apparent, concerned citizens and advocates began organizing to help face these environmental challenges. In 1996, the Mashpee Environmental Coalition (MEC) was incorporated with a mission to:

- Promote understanding and appreciation of the natural resources of Mashpee in Cape Cod.
- Provide our community with environmental education in an effort to increase public awareness of and provide advocacy concerning ecological issues.
- Promote practice and enlist participation in stewardship to protect preserving enhance the ecological integrity of our town.

As an extension of our mission, we're pleased to introduce our new column dedicated to the informing, educating and raising awareness to some of our most pressing environmental issues. We are excited about having the opportunity to reach an audience through the print medium.

Content will be provided from the Mashpee Environmental Coalition resources and history, as well as through the work of the many local citizens' groups and governmental agencies partnering with us toward the mitigation of these environmental pressures.

As an organization whose contributions include editing the Town of Mashpee Blue Pages to helping with the acquisition of conservation lands, MEC is also committed to educating the next generation of environmental leaders. We offer a scholarship annually to two deserving Mashpee high school seniors who plan to continue their education, focusing on the environment.

Lastly, we would like to invite the readers of our column to submit their thoughts and ideas for future columns and consider joining us in our work. Contact us through our website at <https://www.mashpeemec.us/>. We look forward to continuing the dialogue in future columns.

Ms. Viglione is a board member of the Mashpee Environmental Coalition and a member of the Facebook group, Mashpee Clean Waters.