# VINEYARD **CONSERVATION**

**Summer 2018**

*Inside:* Take Back the Tap • Hidden Development & New Growth Stats • The Art of Conservation • Waste Reduction • Ocean Pollution • The Tap Water Challenge

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# Take Back the Tap

*"Everyone has the right to water that is physically accessible and in the immediate vicinity of educational institutions, workplaces and health institutions." —UN General Assembly, 2010*

**Water.** The blue blanket covering 70% of the Earth's surface, the vital compound that constitutes 60% of our bodies – it is impossible to think of anything more essential to life. Abundant on Earth yet much less so elsewhere, it is no wonder that any search for life beyond our blue planet often begins with a search for extraterrestrial water. It is also no wonder that those who are striving to improve the living conditions of all humanity view access to clean drinking water as a fundamental human right. The UN statement at the head of this story is just one of many expressions of this idea.

### *For healthy ecosystems — and people*

Clean and readily available water is vital to maintaining the health of natural ecosystems and human communities alike. Here on Martha's Vineyard, the former of these has received considerable attention: threats to water quality have been a point of emphasis for Towns, the MV Commission, non-profits (including VCS), and citizen groups. Problems remain, perhaps the most challenging being the excessive nitrogen in our estuaries. However, the Massachusetts Estuaries Project has now brought specific targets for nitrogen reduction, developed through scientific study, and backed by the force of law. It is fair to say that conservationists have succeeded in convincing the public of the importance of our water resources to a healthy natural environment.

Yet somehow along the way we allowed our drinking water to undergo a dramatic transition, from free-flowing natural resource shared by all to just another commodity: *a product* — packaged, transported, and marketed — available to anyone willing and able to pay. Water fountains have gradually disappeared from the public sphere (routinely left "out of order" two or three decades ago, but today simply gone from most places). Their function is now served by the ubiquitous single-use plastic water bottle. These developments are not coincidences, though we would not be so cynical as to conclude anything about the order of causality (or intent) in this nationwide cultural substitution.

### *Taking back the tap*

Following on the heels of the successful effort to ban disposable plastic checkout bags, the issue of disposable water bottles first appeared to VCS as an obvious next step in waste reduction. When considering all the factors, single-use water bottles were the next most egregious source of unnecessary waste. However, we also recognized that unlike plastic bags, which are easily replaced by better options, much of the public today has a genuine preference for bottled water. An outright ban, even if it was politically possible, would have been inappropriate.

The answer we came to — that we must decrease the demand for bottled water — is the conceptual underpinning of the Take Back the Tap initiative. Research revealed that the factors motivating people to buy bottled water generally fit into two categories: quality and convenience. To address concerns over the taste or cleanliness of tap water, VCS began educational outreach efforts (such as the Tap Water Challenge, see pg. 7). However, it is the second issue — convenience — that may pose the greater challenge. Life moves quickly, even on Martha's Vineyard, and to keep pace, we have grown to rely on a degree of convenience unimaginable a century ago.

This is why we believe the most important accomplishment to date of the Take Back the Tap program has been the installation of water bottle refill stations across the Island. These machines get to the root of both sets of motivators, quality and convenience, by providing chilled, filtered water — not just for free, but also more quickly than buying a bottle from the store or vending machine. Last year the stations were installed in all of our schools, and more recently we have been expanding into high traffic public places. Refill stations can now be found at the Boys & Girls Club, the MV Ice Arena, the Agricultural Hall, the Oak Bluffs Library, and the Edgartown and West Tisbury Town Halls, with more locations still to come. The goal is to create a highly visible network that will decrease the need for bottled water immediately, while over the long haul helping to publicize the fact to visitors (and residents) that we are fortunate to have excellent drinking water on our Island — we should be using it!

### *Consumption and mindfulness*

There are situations where bottled water is entirely justifiable. It can be a necessary part of relief efforts following natural disasters. In many places around the globe, public infrastructure does not provide adequate drinking water; bottled water here may take the form of a 20 liter jug inside homes, similar to the office "water cooler." And while the crisis in Flint,

MI is the rare exception to the rule that municipal drinking water in the USA is safe, it is nonetheless a very real issue.

Yet none of this has anything to do with why, at the beach and the ballgame, the cooler full of ice water has been replaced by a cooler full of iced water bottles. The goal of the Take Back the Tap initiative is to greatly reduce an unnecessary source of waste — and, more broadly, to foster a sense of mindfulness regarding our consumption habits (e.g., the "Zero Waste" movement, see pg. 8).

We consume fifty million single-use water bottles annually in the United States – 167 per person on average – and the overwhelming majority of this waste is not based on a well-founded concern over water quality. In this country, tap water is more tightly regulated than bottled, which often doesn't measure up to the EPA's municipal water quality standards. Independent testing by the Environmental Working Group found 38 pollutants, in various combinations, in ten sampled brands. (If you have a well, you can have your own water tested – unfortunately, at your own expense – but at least you can be reasonably sure the water will be the same from glass to glass, and doesn't contain chemical plasticizers and tiny particles of plastic.)

Finally, we should look beyond the bottle itself to consider the broader impacts of transporting our drinking water from France or Fiji — or even just from Maine and California. Pumping, processing, and bottling is a major contributor to climate change. The real Poland Spring in Maine dried up decades ago; will Nestle, the owner of the water brand that bears its name, be more careful not to deplete the other springs it now sources from? More astonishing (or even outrageous) is the fact that much of today's bottled water comes from municipal supplies in southern California and other western states, where severe drought has become a routine issue. To import drinking water here, to our water-blessed Island, from a place where farmers, homeowners, industry, and the natural environment are desperately clawing for their share of a vital resource is truly a marvel of modern economics that we need not be a part of any longer. *Let's take back the tap!*

## In Memory

We were saddened to learn of the passing this year of two great friends of VCS. Both were intrepid past leaders of our Winter Walks program.

**Bill Graham** shared with us his infectious enthusiasm and love for one of the Island's most diverse landscapes, leading an exhilarating walk around the hilltops and sublime shoreline of his Mohu property, an ecological gem on the Island's north shore. The board and staff offer our sympathy to his wife, former VCS staffer Sally Lasker, and to his whole family.

**Flip Harrington**, seafarer, fishing captain, hunter, and lover of the outdoors teamed up with his wife, naturalist Susan Whiting, to lead a walk just this past November at their Quenames farm. They described the history of fields once pastured with sheep, and the dramatic landscape changes around Black Point Pond and Crab Creek.

On this island, as everywhere, change is in the nature of things. We will miss them both.




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# Out of Sight, Never Out of Mind

VCS has warned for decades that the rate of development on Martha's Vineyard was vastly outpacing land conservation efforts, threatening the natural resources that define this unique place. Despite the constancy of that message — and the fact that it is now more true than ever — the years have seen tectonic shifts in the nature and scale of the challenge.

Fifty years ago, "preserving Island character" was for many a largely aesthetic concern, sometimes quite literally visual. In the absence of zoning rules, hundreds of new houses were rapidly cropping up everywhere (and, according to the sensibilities of the time, they were often rather unattractive ones). Today, with the hindsight of knowing the development yet to come, it would be easy to dismiss those concerns as quaint — but this would be unfair to the true conservationists of the day. The era's lack of planning and legal protection for the environment meant that uncontrolled growth *was* a threat to the natural ecosystems of the Island, even at much lower population density. Without the actions of those founding members of VCS, other nonprofits (such as the Sheriff's Meadow Foundation), and the early Town conservation commissions (and, later, the public MV Land Bank), it is hard to imagine what would have become of Martha's Vineyard.

*"You will not see many of the houses that were built in recent decades. Instead you are far more likely to feel their impact, as larger and more numerous cars, delivery vans, and construction vehicles rush past."*

Which brings us to today's counterintuitive situation. Thanks to zoning laws passed with help from VCS, along with professionalized planning (the MV Commission was founded in 1974), we have gotten very good over the years at hiding even the most rapid development from sight. Take a bike ride down one of our preserved rural roads and you will not see many of the houses that were built in recent decades. Instead, you are far more likely to *feel* their impact, as larger and more numerous cars, delivery vans, and construction vehicles rush past.

Our impressive ability to hide houses has been a mixed blessing because, unfortunately, the effort to limit the environmental impact of all this development has been less successful. Consider our coastal Great Ponds as one example. By limiting density we have successfully preserved globally rare habitats, including sandplain grasslands and heathlands. Unlike on Cape Cod, the ponds remain as peaceful and beautiful as ever, with no highways and big box stores in sight. Just like Cape Cod, however, the water is contaminated by excess nitrogen due to the presence of too many septic systems.

A broader example of the limitations of camouflage is in zoning itself. Requiring large minimum lot sizes for residences has been a powerful force in preserving the character of up-Island towns. However, an unwanted side effect of sprinkling houses more evenly across the countryside is to create a textbook example of habitat fragmentation, which fosters our extremely high deer population (which in turn is the primary factor in our high incidence of tick-borne disease), along with other ecological pests, such as skunks and raccoons.

Ultimately, though, the greatest harm of hiding development from sight would be if its impacts remain hidden from our consciousness as well — until it is

The bird's-eye view of a perforated forest reveals what the trees conceal: privacy for humans with fragmented habitat for wildlife, suburban density with a rural aesthetic. At left, West Tisbury (Deep Bottom Cove), at right, Oak Bluffs. *All aerial photos by David Foster.*

too late to save what is essential. Like the metaphorical frog in a pot, oblivious to the slowly heating water in which it swims, the natural habitats, unique character, and quality of life that define this special place could perish, almost by surprise. While the challenge of reigning in development and mitigating the environmental damage is great, our first step must be to provide that poor frog with a thermometer.

Rolling hills conceal development above Chilmark Pond from the road, but not the water — or the air.

# Conservation & Development: By the Numbers

The rapid scale of development in recent years is well illustrated by data we acquired this winter from the MV Commission. Between 2005 and 2016, over 2,300 acres of open space on Martha's Vineyard were developed, with the lion's share being in Chilmark and Edgartown (about 700 and 800 acres, respectively). Despite the financial collapse ten years ago, resulting recession and slow recovery, development on Martha's Vineyard mostly kept its pace.

The MVC numbers do reflect a pause in building in 2009, when only 129 acres of open space (across 66 parcels) were developed. However, in the very next year, 326 acres were lost. (Interestingly, it was "only" 87 parcels that were newly-built in 2010, so the near-tripling in lost open space was more due to construction on larger lots than an increase in the total number of new buildings.)

Conservation efforts to date have secured permanent protection for about a third of the Island's land, while another third has already been developed. The oft-overlooked reality is that the final third, about 18,000 acres of unbuilt forests and fields we currently appreciate as open space, *are* buildable. At VCS, our most essential land protection message is that the fate of this last third, the buildable open space, will determine the future of Martha's Vineyard. Market pressures ensure that that this unbuilt-but-buildable land will not remain so forever; all of it will be developed or put into some form of conservation, probably sooner rather than later.

*"Unbuilt-but-buildable land will not remain so forever; all of it will be developed or put into some form of conservation, probably sooner rather than later."*

Current growth projections from the MVC indicate that ultimately about 80% of this land will be built out, with 20% conserved. This scenario envisions construction of about 7,000 new main houses and 9,000 guesthouses, which will accommodate a doubling in both the year-round and seasonal populations. We have proposed reversing this ratio: a vision of the future where 80% is conserved and 20% developed, protecting our wildlife and globally unique ecosystems, clean drinking water and coastal ponds, agricultural soils, and Island quality of life. With smarter growth — development in the interest of the community, not short-term profit — we can provide for affordable housing and a sustainable economy for the future while consuming much less acreage.

The new data indicates that in recent years conservation has done a bit better than the MVC's 80:20 forecast (though not nearly as well as our 20:80 goal). Between 2005 and 2016, the Land Bank, nonprofits, and individual towns placed 1,443 acres into conservation, balanced against the 2,326 acres de-

veloped over that time — in other words, about 62% developed, 38% conserved. Unfortunately, the numbers are less rosy since 2010, when the market resumed its frantic pace: 72% developed, 28% conserved. Perhaps the most important fact revealed by the 2010–2016 data is simply this: across just seven years, nearly 1,600 acres of that unbuilt-but-buildable land found its ultimate destination in development or permanent conservation.

*"With smarter growth – development in the interest of the community, not short-term profit – we can provide for affordable housing and a sustainable economy for the future while consuming much less acreage."*

The message we draw from these numbers is that the need for greater conservation action is urgent — that poor frog needs to jump now, or perish. Clearly, new sources of funding will be required if we are to "save what's left" of Martha's Vineyard. However, the market has made it abundantly clear that the most lucrative use of our dwindling open space is the construction of seasonal homes. Therefore, new regulatory protections and greatly expanded landowner action must also play a large role. These actions by private individuals need not be purely philanthropic. Along with the knowledge that they are helping preserve natural habitats, property owners may enjoy personal benefits when buying abutting land and placing some or all of it in conservation. One popular avenue is for neighbors who share a common interest to band together to buy land when it comes on the market, providing benefits of nature enjoyment and open space for all. We urge all our members to support open space initiatives within their Towns (and elsewhere), and for those who are in a position to personally help conserve open space, to please contact VCS to learn more.

# Microplastics & Ocean Pollution

*Research and solutions presented at the Annual Meeting*

It is hardly controversial to note that plastic is a ubiquitous feature of the habitat of the modern human. However, at this year's VCS Annual Meeting, many were surprised to learn that plastic has now moved far beyond the human environment to be found virtually everywhere, from Arctic ice to deep-sea trenches, hidden in boutique brands of sea salt and even floating as particles in the air.

That was the wake-up call from special guest speaker Jessica Donahue, researcher from the Sea Education Association (SEA). For thirty years, SEA has been collecting data on marine plastic debris in the North Atlantic. Analysis of that dataset, the largest in the world, has yielded estimates of the total amount of plastic in the ocean and other insights. Yet many questions remain, particularly the role of microplastics, the tiny particles (smaller than a grain of rice) created by the breakdown of plastic once it is exposed to the elements. Jessica's work focusing on microplastics has shed light on how the many polymers differ in their toxicity, persistence, and origin, as well as the uneven dispersal of all that material — over 200,000 metric tons — across the oceans.

However, her message was hardly "doom-and-gloom." The primary source of plastic coming into the ocean is what she called "mismanaged" waste, and governments across the globe are gradually catching up to the problem. Improved waste disposal practices can prevent millions of metric tons of plastic from entering the oceans every year.

On an individual level, behavior change — reducing the amount of plastic we use — makes a real difference and can help build momentum across society. Bag bans, water bottle refill stations, skipping the straw — these are all methods to reduce the use of what SEA research, among others, reveal to be the most common items being put into the oceans. Public demand is already driving innovation and change. Surveys indicate that 90% of people prefer to not be automatically given a plastic drinking straw at restaurants, and

*Members mingle at the VCS Annual Meeting*

97% disapprove of many "single use" applications in general.

At the end of her presentation, Jessica concluded, "I am hopeful that we are seeing a fundamental shift. It is a messy web, but the little shifts — in purchasing, packaging, transporting — all those little changes will make a big difference. Five years from now we will be seeing a new norm."

# The Tap Water Challenge

*Sutdents and entertainers turn an advertising tool on its head*

Beginning in 1975, the "Pepsi Challenge" advertising campaign was based on a simple single-blind taste test. Participants (usually shoppers in malls and elsewhere) were given two unmarked cups, one filled with Coca-Cola, the other Pepsi. Naturally, the majority chose Pepsi as their favorite — otherwise, the Challenge never would have become one the most well-known examples of marketing in American history.

Not to diminish PepsiCo's accomplishment (the campaign certainly did work), but a much more impressive achievement in marketing was occurring during roughly the same time period. True, Pepsi took market share from Coke, but they were selling a similar product for a similar price. In contrast, the bottled water industry (including, of course, both Pepsi and Coke) changed not just a brand preference, but altered people's entire worldview. How do you convince the public to pay for something they were already getting for free? (Or, to be more precise, how do you convince them to pay again for something they already paid for with their taxes, water bill, or well?)

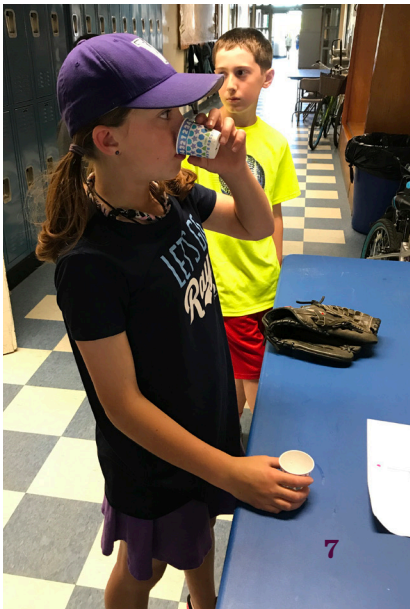
Today, many people distrust water fountains as germ vectors. Others see bottled water as a status symbol — an indicator of not only disposable income, but healthy lifestyle choices. Mostly, people believe (some rightly, some wrongly) that bottled water just tastes better than what comes from their own faucet.

It is that last brilliant bit of marketing that has been under attack recently. On college campuses across the country, students have been turning the advertisers' methods against them, conducting blind taste tests of bottled vs. tap water. Usually, the tap water comes out ahead. Similar taste tests have been featured on national TV news programs, with videos clips now circling the internet.

More amusing (if a bit less rigorous) was Penn & Teller's "*Bottled Water*," a satirical social experiment from their long-running TV series. The comedy duo, known for skewering cultural trends, staged a "water tasting" at a fine dining restaurant. Instead of a blind taste test, they turned the method inside out, creating six new brands of bottled water (each with its own custom label) along with a menu to describe the flavor attributes of each. With the exception of "Amazon" brand (pronounced with a long "o"), which notably included one very large spider inside the bottle, the guests had generally positive impressions of all the designer waters. However, the more important result is probably that people perceived meaningful differences among the brands at all. In reality, all six bottles were identical, having been filled by a garden hose outside the restaurant. It would appear that much of our taste preferences really are in our heads.

We could never compete with Penn & Teller's stunt, but VCS did try our hand at a "Tap Water Challenge" this spring as part of Zero Waste Week at the Tisbury School. In our blind taste test, 26 of the 39 kids who participated preferred the tap water, which was supplied by the water bottle refill station installed last year at the school. Ten chose the commercial bottled water, while three reported no difference. Even without the knowledge that they were helping save thousands of plastic bottles from our waste stream, two-thirds of the students chose the tap water. (If we lump together the "no difference" votes, three-quarters *didn't* choose bottled water.) Considering that the Pepsi Challenge campaign spent untold millions touting much smaller preferences, those are excellent results for a blind taste test — a powerful vote of confidence for the Take Back the Tap initiative!

During Zero Waste Week, Tisbury students took the VCS Tap Water Challenge — two-thirds preferred tap water to bottled!



# Reducing the Unmanageable

*Think globally, act locally — China's National Sword policy brings new urgency to timeless advice*

Imagine if a garbage truck dropped a full load of plastic directly into the ocean — once per minute, all day, every day of the year. That is one of the visually evocative descriptions the World Economic Forum presented to illustrate the findings of their 2016 report on the state of the modern plastics economy. Another image, more frequently reported in the press, is that by 2050 there will be more plastic than fish by weight in the ocean.

These headline-grabbers are backed up by an exhaustive study of the global system of plastic manufacturing, recycling, waste management, and pollution. Of the 78 million tons of plastic packaging produced annually, only 14% is collected for recycling (and only 2% actually returns to use as recycled packaging), while 54% is landfilled or incinerated. The remaining 34%, what our Annual Meeting speaker Jessica Donahue referred to as "mismanaged waste," and the World Economic Forum termed "leakage," is lost from the system. Almost all of this waste eventually comes to rest in the ocean — some of it immediately, having been dumped on beaches or at sea, but much of it after a long journey through our groundwater, streams, and rivers. *This* is our metaphorical garbage truck sitting on a dock, making deliveries by the minute.

Throughout its history, VCS has been involved in efforts to improve our Island's waste management, from helping establish our first recycling systems, to collecting boat shrink wrap, to early initiatives in community composting. We still believe waste management is as important as ever — as Jessica pointed out, the fastest way to address the flood of plastics into the ocean would be for governments worldwide to reduce mismanaged waste by simply collecting it more effectively.

Today, however, the nature of the plastics economy and pollution problems require that we better address the other side of the equation. Since China's announcement last year of a ban on the importation of plastic waste — their "National Sword" policy — Americans must find a new destination for much of our recycling. Unfortunately, for now a large portion is going to incinerators and landfills (a.k.a. the trash — *after* being "recycled" by individuals), exported to countries without the systems to recycle it properly, or simply left to pile up in warehouses onshore. Recycling alone could never handle the scale of the world's waste production. Now what happens in the future if China domestically produces too much plastic waste for their recycling system?

Nina Hitchen presenting at one of this spring's "Breaking Free from Plastic" workshops at Island Cohousing

VCS was honored to present this sculpture created by campers at Sense of Wonder at the Ocean Awareness Tent, a collaborative effort for this year's Vineyard Cup between Sail MV and Island conservation groups. 167 plastic water bottles were used — the same number as are consumed annually by the average American.

This new economic reality underscores the importance of reducing waste, not just managing it. Most VCS waste reduction initiatives focus on unnecessary packaging, such as the "Bring Your Own" campaign, the plastic bag bylaw, and the water bottle refill station project. Some recent collaborations with student groups have also challenged the overuse of certain "luxuries" — mass releases of helium balloons and restaurants giving out plastic drinking straws by default. This spring we were happy to become involved in the budding Zero Waste movement, joining with Nina Hitchen of Plastic Free on MV for a series of educational workshops, as well as taking part in our local schools' Zero Waste Week activities.

## What is Zero Waste?

*an interview with Moira Silva*

Zero Waste. For the uninitiated it might sound like a bridge too far — *Zero?*

At its most fundamental, zero waste is a state of mind, a determination to be more mindful of one's consumption habits and their impact on the environment. In practice, that can be as simple as bringing your own grocery bag to as ambitious as living in a way that one's trash for an entire year fits into a mason jar.

Recently, VCS has been part of a team helping to bring zero waste ideas to the Island

West Tisbury School Principal Donna Lowell-Bettencourt and student Mya O'Neill show off their new bottle refill station.

school community, resulting in reduced use of disposables in cafeterias, phasing out of single-use water bottles, encouraging parents to BYO place setting to events, and many other changes. A major achievement of this effort has been the Island schools' involvement in Zero Waste Week (a program created by the National Marine Sanctuaries).

Locally, Zero Waste Week, as well as many other school waste reduction efforts, has been spearheaded by writer and West Tisbury School parent Moira Silva. We asked Moira to share her thoughts on what Zero Waste means to her.

**VCS: What advice might you offer to someone who feels that zero waste is simply too high a standard?**

Moira: My advice? Do what you can. There are many easy, fun ways to get started. Maybe start by ordering an ice cream cone instead of an ice cream in a dish that comes with a plastic spoon. When shopping online, request plastic-free packaging (yes, they really will do it!). Next time you dine out, politely refuse the plastic straw. Save money by taking a shorter shower or turning down the thermostat a degree. My family always has fun thinking of "that one more thing" we can be doing. Now, the challenge for our community is, what's the "one more thing" the Island can do?

**How did Zero Waste Week start on MV? How has it grown since then?**

It began last year at the West Tisbury School. This year, nearly all the Island schools, including Vineyard Montessori and MV Public Charter School hosted a Zero Waste Week. Representatives from the schools are working collaboratively to share ideas. Now I'm hoping to connect with the Island preschools about joining in too.

**Can you give some examples of favorite projects or experiences that have been part of the program?**

In Oak Bluffs, students in the engineering classes used silverware and cloth donated from local businesses to create their very own, self-designed silverware packs. This was a way they could begin to address the plastic utensil use in their cafeteria. Upper-level Vineyard Montessori Students created a zero waste educational game and presented it not only to younger students at their school, but also to 1st graders at the Oak Bluffs School. Students at the West Tisbury School took on a variety of "zero waste challenges" at home, like turning out the lights during dinner, or packing a cloth napkin with their lunch.

**What do you hope for students to get from their involvement?**

We are constantly inundated with scary things in the news that we have no control over. Zero waste is a great topic for students to work on, because they can do things that really have an impact, while young and/or sensitive kids can be spared the gory details. Hopefully, children start to notice some of the many opportunities to reduce waste all around them, and feel empowered to make a difference in big and small ways, in and out of school.

**What do you see as the future goals of the program?**

In the short term, I hope even more teachers, in all subject areas, will see how zero waste offers many practical, hands-on opportunities. As a former Island teacher, I loved whenever I could translate my lessons into something that felt "real" for my students. Kids can come up with amazing solutions, and sometimes those can even lead to policy changes, like replacing cafeteria-provided juice boxes with jugs of fruit-infused water, served in reusable cups. Or even change policy outside of the school – as the Safe Sea MV 6th graders at West Tisbury did.

Long term, I would love to see the schools start to reach out to the community and invite them to participate in zero waste week. Everyone benefits. Offices who adopt some zero waste practices can save money in many areas. Schools, businesses, nonprofits – we can all do one more thing. It's about everyone finding that "one more thing," giving it a try, and feeling good about it. When we have a common goal, small things add up to make a difference.

The teachers working on these initiatives have a wealth of ideas and experiences. It's really about listening to their ideas and seeing where this takes us, which is hopefully beyond our imagination right now!

**What does zero waste mean for our community more broadly?**

Zero waste means making the most with what you've got. It's in our roots. It's the only way our ancestors survived. Ideally, zero waste is the way of the past, present, and future here.

A perfect example of zero waste thinking today are the Islanders who hunt deer for food, while very consciously using every part of the animal. Many of us are already choosing more efficient cars, bringing a reusable mug to score a nice discount on organic coffee, knitting winter hats with local wool, marveling at the wonder of a tasty farm egg, etc.

Living on an Island means we have an even greater responsibility to protect and celebrate our natural resources. We see first-hand the effects of our waste when we find balloons, bags, straws, and more strewn along our picturesque shorelines. Even if they don't all use the phrase to describe the effort, community leaders like VCS, Plastic Free MV, Straw Free MV, Safe Seas MV and others are showing how zero waste living can heal the environment. Simple things like the policy at Sail MV asking campers not to bring plastic water bottles, or Island Grown Initiative offering local food tastings at the elementary schools, all help bring zero waste thinking into our everyday mindset. The Vineyard has the potential to be a shining example, a point of both pride and unity for our community.

In the true spirit of Zero Waste Week, Tisbury students reused the cups from the Tap Water Challenge for a planting craft with art teacher Julie Brand.

# VCS News Round-Up

## Coastal Adaptation: Working with, Not Against Nature

Powerful rains, wind-driven snow, power outages, damaged trees, flooding, coastal erosion . . . this past winter and spring saw more unpredictable weather than usual. Though ahead of schedule, that wild ride has been anticipated by climate scientists for more than a decade. More heat, even in winter, translates into more energy in weather systems, increasing the frequency and intensity of storms. With further warming for Southeast Massachusetts and the Islands still to come over the next few decades, the need for adaptation planning is urgent.

VCS was honored to participate in this year's MV Coastal Conference, a gathering of scientists and state and local officials in June at the Harbor View Hotel. As usual, adaptation to climate change and sea level rise was a chief point of emphasis, with a special focus this year on increased intensity and frequency of coastal storms. However, the presentations and discussions ran the full gamut of local coastal issues and projects, including nitrogen pollution, offshore wind energy, aquaculture, fisheries, and even one study of the natural movement of unexploded ordinance.

During the concluding roundtable discussion, VCS advocated for "Climate Smart" adaptation strategies: relocating infrastructure out of vulnerable areas, leaving lands undeveloped, and protecting coastlines through soft stabilization (such as the conservation of wetlands, which buffer storm energy), rather than hard armoring with seawalls or revetments. Adapting to our new reality is the responsibility of all, and VCS will continue to advocate for solutions that work with, rather than attempting to dominate, our changing nature.

Bruce Golden and Doug Plath lead the Menemsha clean-up team.


## The Earth Day Beach Clean-Up

Over 250 volunteers, spread out over 26 beaches (including, for the first time, Jetty Beach in Oak Bluffs), collected an unusually large amount of trash at this year's Earth Day Beach Clean-Up. In Tisbury alone, 3,380 pounds were collected, the Refuse District (representing the haul from Edgartown and up-Island) took in 2,880 pounds, and an unknown (but substantial) amount from Oak Bluffs added up to about four tons of waste — all removed from the beaches in just two hours. One explanation for the size of the year's take is the large number of big, heavy items washed ashore by the series of four powerful storms that struck the Island in March. However, the usual suspects — the plastic bottles, balloons and strings, cigarette butts, and miscellaneous debris that are the greatest threats to marine life — were still as abundant as ever.

Following that stormy March, the brilliant sunshine greeting our volunteers at the after-party was a welcome sign of spring. Held for the first time at the Sailing Camp in O.B., moods were brightened as kids explored a natural playground of fallen trees, adults enjoyed the view of the lagoon, and everyone shared in the great food donated by our sponsors.

The highlight of the party was the celebration of the passage of a bylaw to stop the intentional release of helium balloons. Seventh grader Mya O'Neill gave a presentation on how "Safe Sea MV," a group of students at the West Tisbury School, made it happen (see the next story for more).

Thanks are in order to: our fiscal sponsors, Cape & Islands United Way, MV Savings Bank, and MVY Radio; to Josh Aronie, the Black Dog, Scottish Bakehouse, the FARM Institute, and IGI's Farm Hub for food donations; to Robert Lionette and our team of volunteers for running the kitchen; to our beach group leaders; and to every single volunteer who joined together in a community effort to protect our ocean environment!

## Keeping Seas Safe from Helium Balloons: Students Honored at State House

On behalf of their group Safe Sea MV, twenty-one students from the West Tisbury School traveled to the Massachusetts State House this spring to accept their Green Difference Award from the state's Project Green Schools. Winning in the category of Outstanding Green Community Hero (and also receiving an honorable mention for Outstanding Green Student), the Safe Sea MV kids got to pose for photos in the Great Hall of Flags while receiving their official citation signed by the President of the Senate, Clerk of the Senate, and our local Senator Julian Cyr.

The students were recognized for their hard work in creating and winning passage for a bylaw that would ban the intentional release of helium balloons. Lighter-than-air balloons become a serious threat to wildlife once they come back down to Earth — very often in the ocean. Led by their teacher Zoe Turcotte, the Safe

Sea group petitioned to get the bylaw on the warrants in four towns (Aquinnah, West Tisbury, Tisbury, and Oak Bluffs), then attended each Town Meeting and gave passionate speeches and answered voter questions — ultimately winning passage by large majorities in each town. The next step for the group is to get the bylaw on the warrant for next year's Town Meetings in Chilmark and Edgartown.

VCS Vice President Joan Malkin, the original driving force behind the high school art contest, presents this year's Art of Conservation winners at the Nature as Inspiration film festival.

*Thanks to West Tisbury Principal Donna Lowell-Bettencourt for contributing to this story*

## The Art of Conservation: Habitat

First launched in 2014, the Art of Conservation contest encourages local high school students to reflect on the value of nature and what it means to them, and then to express themselves through the medium of their choice. We see this as an vital opportunity to deepen the sense of place among our young adults and connect them to local, and global, environmental issues.

Suitable to this year's broad theme of "Habitat," the contest's 64 entries represented a diversity of media, including photographs, painting, drawing, crafts, sculpture, and (for the first time) architectural models. Taking first prize honors were Jonathan Chivers and Olivia Schroeder for their photography, and Owen Metell for architecture. In addition, special distinctions were awarded to Felix Colon, Simone Davis, Jeneleigh Griffin, Jenna Joseph, Julianne Joseph, Hemilly Nascimento, Aidan Nunes, and Davin Tackabury, along with two extra "VCS Staff Picks" awarded to Frank Cray and Josue Dos Santos. All winners were honored at an awards ceremony during — and their works displayed throughout — this year's Nature as Inspiration film festival.

Special thanks are due to: our contest judges, celebrated local painter Harry Seymour, architect and botanist Margaret Curtin, and photographer and Field Gallery curator Jhenn Watts; the teachers from across the MVRHS Art Department who provided support for the competition; local painter Susie White, who worked with painting students as they explored this year's theme; and the Martha's Vineyard Cultural Council for financial support.

## Nature as Inspiration

This Memorial Day weekend marked the fourth year of our annual collaboration with the MV Film Society, the Nature as Inspiration environmental film festival. Exploring humanity's relationship with the natural world, this year's inspirational and thought-provoking features included screenings of *Living in the Future's Past, The Gardener, Ocean Warriors: Chasing the Thunder, Just Eat It, The Serengeti Rules, Love and Bananas: An Elephant Story, The True Cost,* and *The Farthest,* along with a special youth showing of *Aldabra: Once Upon an Island* and four short films, including two by local filmmakers Liz Witham and Ken Wentworth.

Many thanks are due to: our guest experts, film directors, and community members who led the Q&A sessions after each screening; the festival sponsors, Polly Hill Arboretum, Nobnocket Boutique Inn, Progressive Asset Management, Lauren Morgan, Island Housing Trust, Mass Cultural Council, MV Savings Bank, Island Grown Initiative, Sail MV, and the MV Fishermen's Preservation Trust; and Richard Paradise and his staff at the Film Center for making it all happen.

## High School Students Volunteer for a Greener Vineyard

VCS was pleased to host two volunteer work groups this May as part of the MV Regional High School's "Island Youth Give Back Bay." One group, led by teacher Billy Seaborne, met with VCS staff for a beach clean-up along the Lagoon. Canvasing the shore from Hines Point to the Shellfish Hatchery yielded a myriad of plastic debris, a powerful lesson in the persistence of plastic in our ocean environment.

Our other group, led by teachers Corinne Kurtz and Cheri Cluff, met us in West Tisbury for some strenuous conservation field work. Digging out the root systems of the invasive Black Swallow-wort vine was challenging work, providing many of the students a chance to more literally "give (their) back" to protect an important ecosystem. This non-native milkweed competes with native milkweeds, threatening to reduce habitat for Monarch and other butterfly species. Thanks to all the students and teachers who helped make it happen!

High school volunteers dig out invasive Black Swallow-wort vines as part of "Give Back" day.

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*Front cover photo by Jonathan Chivers, 2018 Art of Conservation First Place Winner*

*Photo below by Davin Tackabury, 2018 Art of Conservation Special Distinction Winner*