

VINEYARD CONSERVATION

WINTER 2023

Inside: The Art of Conservation • Climate Action • Compost Update • The Goshawk • Island Eats • On Our Watch • Preserving West Tisbury



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Nature & Humanity, Flourishing Together

The familiar patterns of seasonal change, and with it the changing rhythms of life on Martha's Vineyard, are a welcome annual occurrence. Less welcome though are some of the changes caused by our own actions, like coastal ponds becoming so polluted that they are now off-limits much of the summer. These are outcomes that we have the power to control, yet have failed to. Every brilliant blue-green algae bloom is a visual reminder of a collective failure to overcome the mighty economic forces driving the explosive growth and development on the Island in recent years.

Yet despite those worst examples of environmental loss, the Vineyard Conservation Society knows, based on more than 55 years of advocacy work, that while change is unavoidable, bad outcomes are by no means inevitable. VCS successfully fended off dense subdivision development in the 1970s and '80s, when that was the most lucrative form of land profiteering. In the '90s and 2000s, we stopped the destruction of contiguous habitat to create private golf courses. In many cases, averting those bad outcomes led directly to the land being permanently protected (sometimes by VCS, often in collaboration with colleagues). Throughout, we fought to secure regulatory protection for our ponds, roadsides, and iconic places, and used legal defense to overcome threats to lands already conserved.

Yes, change is in the nature of things—and the Vineyard will not remain frozen in time—so it is our job to steer that change in the right direction. Recently, as part of a strategic planning process, our Board of Directors approved a new “vision statement,” meant to complement our long-standing mission statement. It seems especially appropriate here:

"A largely unspoiled Martha's Vineyard, ensured through preserved land, clean water, and protected biological heritage, where natural communities thrive and human communities flourish with minimal conflict, at levels that can be sustained into the future"

We remain confident in this community's ability to progress in a sustainable way that results in fewer bad outcomes—and with your help, we intend to continue to lead that effort. Thank you!

Brendan O'Neill, Executive Director



Center photo by Signe Benjamin; photo of Ollie Becker by Ray Ewing

The Goshawk

by Warren Woessner

It's a big falcon that sits so still it could be a twisted branch of the tree I stood under for ten minutes chatting with other birders who had been walking down icy trails trying to find it.

The winter light is failing and we are about to leave when a young family—father, mother and a four year old walk out of the woods not dressed like birders at all more House of Gucci than L L Bean

I expect they will just hike past us but the mother kneels down right next to me, in the snowy trail—one arm around her daughter and one holding binoculars and says, “There it is. Right up there!” We turn as one, start taking photos and angling for better views.

I look back and mom is trying to get her child to look at the hawk through her grown-up's binoculars. If she gets it right this child will grow up to see other Goshawks—some defending the nest and some soaring over canyons and pines, drunk on blood. And I think of how many goshawks I've seen in fifty-one years of birding—maybe 4 or 5—and I think without regret, almost content, that this may well be my last one.

"The Goshawk" first appeared in the online magazine On the Seawall (published by Ron Slate of Aquinnah). It appears here courtesy of poet (and VCS Board member) Warren Woessner.



Welcome Aboard!

Please welcome three additions to the VCS Board of Directors



Ollie Becker grew up on Tisbury Great Pond, forming an enduring connection to nature at a young age. After graduating from Bard College in 2008, he spent a decade in Los Angeles, producing unscripted TV series for major networks. He moved back to the Vineyard in 2018 and began working for Circuit Arts (formerly MV Film Festival),

making short films about the issues facing our community and the environment. Merging the art of filmmaking with his love of nature led to a collaboration with VCS to create a film series about the Island's great ponds, with its first episode, “On Our Watch,” premiering at our 2022 Annual Meeting. Inspired by the multifaceted approach VCS takes to environmental advocacy, Ollie joined the Board as a way to become even more involved with protecting this fragile and beautiful island.



Alexis Moreis is a community relations advisor and cultural consultant within Wampanoag Nation, working in Tribal historic preservation and with Island conservation nonprofits. She also manages her family's restoration company, Rapid Recovery

MV. Raised in Oak Bluffs, Alexis attended Brown University and continues to live on Noepe (aka Martha's Vineyard), as her Wôpanâak family has for 12,000 years. Alexis's work focuses on environmental justice, land rematriation, and sovereign hunting, fishing, and gathering rights. She served as a consultant for the National Environmental Policy Act and National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 review process for Vineyard Wind, successfully designating Chappaquiddick as a Traditional Cultural Property. Alexis's work securing an ethnographic study as part of the Vineyard Wind project will continue in developing relationships of reciprocity with Wampanoag natural and cultural resources.



Carolyn O'Brien has been a year-round visitor to Martha's Vineyard for more than 20 years. She and her husband were married here, and her daughter first visited the Island at six weeks old. The VCS mission is closely aligned with Carolyn's environmental values, developed during her childhood in rural Vermont, education at Williams College (BA) and Georgetown University (JD), and professional career. Previously serving as head of communications and fundraising for the Conservation Law Foundation, and later as executive director of a coalition of 40 nonprofits, Carolyn today leads an environmental consulting firm in Cambridge, Mass., where she helps social change organizations develop sustainability solutions. Carolyn and family are delighted to have recently purchased a fixer-upper home in West Tisbury and look forward to adopting VCS' Vineyard Lawn practices—and they welcome any other sustainable home renovation advice!

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Preserving West Tisbury – Sustaining an Island Community

Town Meeting adopts bylaw to limit impact and scale of new development

A theme this newsletter seeks to highlight is that, though change is in the nature of all things, not every particular change is inevitable. The work of VCS is to amplify the collective voice of our members—you—to speak up for the type of change that will create a sustainable future for the Island.

One powerful example of a community shaping its own future is West Tisbury's recent response to the rapidly increasing size of houses built in town. With last year's overwhelming vote in support of what was commonly called the "Big House Bylaw," West Tisbury became the third Island town to place limits on house size, joining Chilmark (who passed a similar measure at Town Meeting 2013), and Aquinnah (who added a requirement to review large house projects under the authority of the townwide District of Critical Planning Concern established by the MVC in 2000). Similar to those previous campaigns, the movement in West Tisbury came in response to the increased speed and scale of development in recent years, threatening the rural, cultural, and natural character of the town.

Why Regulate House Size?

It is important to acknowledge at the outset that the increasing size of houses is only one aspect of the booming growth underway in West Tisbury, and across the Island—and not necessarily the most impactful. It's the *total number* of new projects that is primarily driving both seasonal and year-round population growth (though bigger size does increase a house's short-term rental occupancy potential, a non-trivial consideration at a time when we are all carefully counting our nitrogen budget). So then, the opening question must be, "Why do we care about house size?"

First, larger houses have an outsized impact on the land upon which they are built. This can be very literal, in the sense of the amount of grading done to alter the landform—or when soil is exchanged as fill is trucked out during excavation, and then trucked back in again for landscaping after completion. Larger footprints require more clearing, increasing impacts to habitat (which in turn increases the project's impact on groundwater and pond health, due to the importance of functional ecosystems in cleaning the water). And while it is not always the case, most often larger houses come with larger lawns, and larger—and more numerous—accessories, like pools, tennis courts, outbuildings, and parking areas.

Second, there is the effect overlarge houses and sprawling estates have on the affordability of living in town, and the risk this poses to the character and community of the Island. Just as we do when advocating for environmental protection, we should ask ourselves if we are selling the prospects of future generations for today's profits in this sense as well.

Finally, we should consider the impacts of our decisions that occur outside our own backyard. The "embedded carbon," *i.e.* the resources consumed in terms of the materials themselves (wood, concrete, steel, glass, and stone), plus the energy used by trucking them in from across the country (or world), is entirely

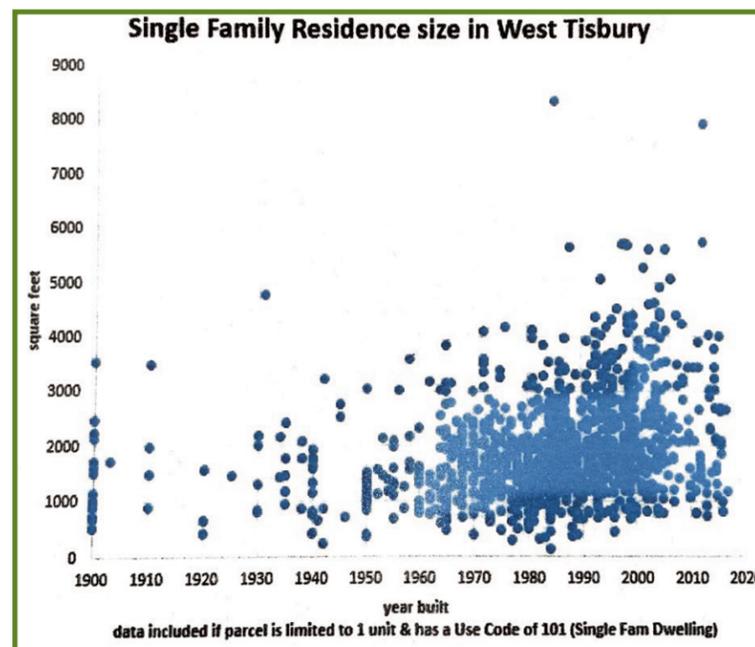
dependent on the size of the house. Energy efficiency (or even zero-net-energy) helps mitigate the climate impact going forward, but—to be blunt—a big house has a big carbon footprint, period. The trend toward larger and larger house sizes is the wrong direction for an Island rightfully concerned about climate change.

Preserve West Tisbury

The West Tisbury campaign began when resident Harriet Bernstein gathered a group of like-minded community members, including Samantha Look, VCS Advocacy and Education director. Sam brought the VCS perspective to the group and facilitated our ability to put our full support toward the effort. The informal group of community activists ultimately evolved into a subcommittee of the West Tisbury Planning Board, taking on the name "Preserve West Tisbury."

Preserve West Tisbury (PWT) began their work with information gathering: listening to other residents, consulting builders and engineers, and collecting data. The anecdotal feedback and the number crunching agreed: this was a community growing at an incredible rate, with a clear trend toward increasing house size. For most of the last century, house sizes clustered from 1,500–2,500 sq ft, with a handful of outliers around 3,500 sq ft. But toward the end of the century, houses between 3,000 and 6,000 sq ft became much more common—and the outliers grew to 8,000 sq ft or more.

The next task for PWT was to define more exactly what they hoped to accomplish. Broadly, everyone agreed that the goal was to establish both meaningful limits and a well-defined, objective review process to assess projects in terms of their environmental impact, as well as scale, proportion, and relationship to the existing community. But the group quickly discovered that achieving those goals would require regulations that were extremely granular, encompassing more than a simple limit on the square footage of one building. This in turn would require significant study of the Town's existing zoning bylaws and relevant definitions.



The questions arising from that process were many. What do we make of accessory buildings? Which ones constitute living space and which don't, and should either or both count towards the total allowed size? Do porches count? (Does it matter if they're screened in?) What about basements—is it just "more house," or is it an efficient use of space that should be encouraged? Should living space be measured on the inside or outside of the building? (It's a seemingly trivial question, but important: measuring the outside is standard, and directly reflects the visual impact, but also acts as a disincentive to using thicker, energy saving, walls.)

Overall, the task was to effectively capture those projects that are truly excessive while not preventing a growing family's ability to add bedrooms. But what is the magic number? How big is "big enough"—and by whose measuring stick? That is where PWT returned to the data, noting that despite the rising slope of mean house size, the more typical house was still coming in under 2,200 sq ft. The topline numbers that emerged ended up very similar to those adopted by Chilmark: a limit of 3,500 sq ft on a 3-acre lot, with proportional increases in building size with lot size. Those numbers allowed for some growth in the average house size while arresting the worrying trend of "leapfrogging" the previous splashy build. Most current projects would still be allowed under the new rules, but today's outliers would not become tomorrow's norm.

A Resounding Message

While the new rules will have a direct effect by preventing—or scaling back—certain proposals, the more powerful impact may come from the message it sends: a clear statement, amplified by the resounding vote at Town Meeting, of the values held by the community. People come from all over the world to build homes on Martha's Vineyard, and without a formal declaration of those values, spelled out in our bylaws, it's not realistic to expect that everyone will instinctively absorb them.

No one wants our Island to become just another previously-unique East Coast tourist destination. But, to avoid that outcome, we must articulate a clear alternative. The sum of our decisions as a community determines whether we protect biodiversity and ecological integrity, and the Island's scenic beauty and quality of life. Change is all around us; we must be agents of that change, not mere spectators.

VCS Voices: Margaret Curtin

as interviewed by Linda Jones

We hope you enjoy this first installment of our new feature, a series of profiles of VCS Members, by Members, exploring what they find most essential to our Island environment. Do you know a Member that we should get to know better?

Longtime VCS Member, and former member of our Board of Directors, Margaret Curtin recalls first learning about VCS when Jody Angevin, a classmate of hers from Smith College, invited her to the Island. On that trip, Jody told her about volunteering while she was in high school on a project led by Bob Woodruff, former VCS Executive Director, to introduce recycling to the Island. When Margaret finished school in 1975, she moved to the Vineyard and became friendly with Brendan O'Neill and other environmentally concerned folks in that age cohort. She always had an affinity for the natural world, and her involvement with VCS was an outgrowth of her love of the Island's natural beauty, and interest in conserving it.

What inspires Margaret most about VCS is the ability of the organization to be the public face of advocacy for sustainability and protection of the Island's natural resources, and especially in being unafraid to take sometimes unpopular stands on land, development, and other issues. Because VCS is not primarily a land-holding organization, it has the freedom to pursue more wide-ranging goals, for instance to act as a liaison between landowners and those land-holding groups, providing legal know-how and general advice to guide them toward a good conservation outcome for their land. Often laboring behind the scenes, VCS has done a great deal of the heavy lifting that has resulted in scores of significant properties, and the habitat and ecosystems they support, being protected.

Margaret also told me that she greatly values all the programmatic efforts of VCS, such as the annual beach clean-up, water bottle refill stations, and the other plastics reduction efforts—there are just too many wonderful initiatives to choose a favorite one!

When it comes to the biggest environmental issue facing the island, though, it's more clear: climate change is at the top of the list. Given the seemingly unabated level of development, she wonders just how much the Island can sustain with the added challenges of a changing climate—the threats to our water supply, natural habitats, and ecosystems, the overall loss of species diversity, along with the need for protecting infrastructure, and the other impacts of accelerating sea level rise are all of concern. Nevertheless, it is the efforts she has observed in young people that give her reason to hope for a more environmentally responsible citizenry in the future, for the Island and beyond.

Closer to home, Margaret and her partner Greg Palermo have been working for the past several years on a project (spearheaded by the Polly Hill Arboretum) to update the *Flora of Martha's Vineyard*, an inventory of all the species of vascular plants growing wild on the Island. The original *Flora* was published in 1999 as part of the Martha's Vineyard Sandplain Restoration Project (of which VCS was one of the founding coalition members). Margaret and Greg are now branching out beyond vascular plants, and are currently focused on mosses and liverworts, which she noted can conveniently be studied year-round. We owe them a great debt of gratitude for documenting in detail what we have here to protect, and for their long-running support of the Vineyard Conservation Society.

Right: Margaret simultaneously birding and botanizing, two of her favorite activities



Climate Change: Global Perspective, Local Action

The Vineyard Way: A Plan for Local Climate Action

“Widespread, rapid, and intensifying”

Those were the words chosen by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to introduce their most recent synthesis report on the current impacts of climate change. In other words, the emphasis is no longer future projections—which makes sense, as we are seeing and feeling the effects right now.

Given that urgency, last summer’s release of the Vineyard’s first Climate Action Plan (CAP) came not a moment too soon. Led by the MV Commission, this ambitious project charts a much-needed roadmap, laying out in six thematic areas a set of specific actions to reduce our carbon footprint while more sustainably adapting to the changes underway, and still to come.

At VCS, our top priority is the protection of the land and water of the Island. That’s why we were honored to be asked by the MVC planners to take a leadership role, via staffer Samantha Look, in developing the plan’s section on Land Use, Natural Resources, and Biodiversity. Proposed actions emerging from the process include: managing (or halting) growth in flood zones and other vulnerable areas, conserving estuary systems, setting limits on land disturbance around new development, creating standards for the use of native vegetation in landscaping, and improving regulatory protection for drinking and surface waters.

Ultimately, climate resilience cannot be achieved without resilient ecosystems. Our overarching objective during the CAP design process was to hold a focus on the importance of land conservation and overall ecosystem health—working to ensure the broader group of planners considered not just where, and

how, development should occur, but also **how much**. To thrive in a changing climate, our land and water must be prioritized for protection, a task that grows increasingly difficult on an island with a fixed amount of land—and growing demands for its use.

The work has just begun for VCS and the dozens of other organizations and individuals who participated in the CAP design process. The critical task ahead is to ensure that the document is true to its name—an **action plan**—and not just a collection of good ideas taking up space on a shelf. There is no time to waste.

Climate Action Week

To that end, while the planning process for the CAP was still underway, groundwork was being laid for the Island’s first-ever Climate Action Week. An Education Subcommittee was formed, including VCS staffers Signe Benjamin and Samantha Look, to envision and organize a series of events that would inspire the community to take action.

The result was a week of events held across the Island, sponsored by a diversity of organizations and businesses, featuring talks, walks, food, music, and more. It all culminated in a grand finale “Climate Fair” at the Grange Hall, complete with an EV parade and the awards presentation for our student art contest, the Art of Conservation.

We are now in the early stages of planning a follow-up event for 2023. Check our website this spring for details as they become available. And please, if you (or your business or organization) would like to take part, let us know! Call our office at 508-693-9588 or email info@vineyardconservation.org

The Art of Conservation

Choosing a theme for the 2022 edition of our annual student art and writing contest was easy. While climate change has loomed in the background of every previous contest, it had not yet been explicitly *the theme*. But with record heat and drought in the news, and climate action taking on new urgency on the Island, it was time to ask the student artists to put their

knowledge, passion, and creativity toward addressing the elephant in the room.

While climate change may seem a challenging—even grim—place to find artistic inspiration, the Vineyard’s young artists were more than up to the task, creating an amazing collection of sculpture, painting, photographs, digital design, and more. The 2022 contest saw a record number of awards, with 26 high school students, plus four middle schoolers, taking home honors. In the painting and drawing category, Kamar Dehaney and Camily Lara each won First Place, with Special Distinctions going to Katherine Chvatal, Emily Gilley, Erin Gilley, Lily Haynes, Beth Jennings, Alana Nevin, and Brooke Ward; for photography, Dylan Bowen and Mya O’Neill took First Place honors, with Special Distinctions for Victor Andrade, Madeline Bengtsson, Sam Folts, Samanta Morgnerova, Hannah Murphy, and Katie Ogden; in digital illustration, First Place awards went to Olivia MacPherson and Crystal Zheng; for their sculptures, Hayleigh Lecoq and Adam Miller took First Place, with Special Distinctions to Lillie Cabral, as well as Jack Engler and Adrian Alberghini for their joint submission; finally, drawings by Marharyta Morozova and Shealyn Smyth were selected as “VCS Staff Picks.” Four entries from middle school students were awarded prizes as well: sculptures by Chase Panico (First Place) and Emery Fullin (Special Distinction), and paintings by Roxy White (First Place) and Nika Montoya (Special Distinction).

Every year, many hands come together to make the contest a great experience. Special thanks are due to those stalwart supporters of our student artists: the dedicated teachers at MV Regional High School (with special recognition for the hard work of Chris Baer); our wonderful judges, Louisa Gould, Melissa Knowles, and Hunter Moorman; the MV Film Society and Featherstone Center for the Arts for hosting the winning works in their Feldman Family Artspace; and the MV Cultural Council for financial support.

Left: Roxy White shows off her first-place winning painting “Doomed but Still Dancing” (Photo by Suzy White)

Right: In addition to reducing waste, Island Eats’ beautiful and sturdy stainless steel bowls also make for a much nicer presentation than throw-away containers. (Photo by Jessica Mason)

Island Eats: Takeout Without the Trash

*In 2022, VCS partnered with Chilmark resident Jessica Mason to launch her vision for reducing the waste associated with the recent explosion in popularity of restaurant takeout: **Island Eats**. This fall, Jessica gave us an update on how things went last summer, and where they’re going next year.*

What was the need you were hoping to address with Island Eats? What sparked the idea?

Waste is a big problem globally, but locally the effects are particularly pronounced: our landfills are full, and now trash is our biggest export. We throw things away and they’re out of sight, out of mind, but nothing really ever goes away, we’re just making it someone else’s problem. Takeout containers—like so many pieces of disposable packaging—are really problematic. We think we can recycle the plastic and cardboard ones, and compost the so-called compostables. But 95% of plastic is never recycled, the cardboard containers can’t be recycled because they have a thin plastic film and retain food residue, and the compostables are only compostable in a commercial facility. All this to say that thousands upon thousands of takeout containers are piling up as trash and contributing to rapid environmental decline.

Like many people, I wanted to find a way to reduce my personal footprint and be a better steward of our environment for the next generation. Since we have existing successful reuse programs on the island—you can return your milk bottles, kombucha bottles, and local honey jars—it really seemed within reach for us to address the mounting issue of takeout waste by implementing a reusable takeout container program across the Island.

When not running Island Eats, I’m the Executive Director of a national nonprofit (Start.coop) focused on helping grow cooperative businesses all across the United States. One of our flagship programs is an accelerator which provides a range of resources and support for purpose-driven startups that share

ownership with their community. It was through this work that I learned about the reuse systems popping up elsewhere in the US and around the world. Reuse is a proven model—in fact it was

the predominant model up until the middle of last century—and at a time of environmental crisis, it seemed like an obvious alternative to a pernicious throw-away culture.

Why did you decide to partner with VCS?

Island Eats was never about going it alone. This really is a community initiative that I hope will very quickly outgrow me and become something much larger, fully embedded in our Island’s culture and economy. With that in mind, from Day 1, I wanted to find a partner organization that could provide some of the organizational support necessary for a small, rapidly growing startup initiative. Since VCS is the preeminent environmental advocacy organization on the Island, it was an obvious choice. Practically speaking, VCS can receive philanthropic support on our behalf, which has been critical as we fundraise to take this from an idea to a fully-fledged startup initiative. Beyond that, I wouldn’t have dreamt of starting Island Eats without consulting with VCS’s super knowledgeable staff—you all really have your fingers on the pulse of environmental work on the Island.

What went well this year? What still needs work?

We had an incredible experience in the pilot program this year. Members of the Island community were incredibly supportive and signed up in droves to participate, as did eleven local restaurants. In addition, two local organizations—Kitchen Porch Catering and Island Grown Initiative—stepped up to share their kitchen space so we can professionally wash and sanitize the bowls after each use. The program overall has run smoothly, with restaurant owners reporting that it’s been really seamless and easy to participate in Island Eats, which is always important, especially in the hectic summer season. I’m so grateful for the way that people have rallied around Island Eats and are rooting for our success.

The hardest thing is just getting the word out about Island Eats to potential customers. Despite great coverage in the local papers, radio stations, and magazines, very few people even know that Island Eats exists. When folks hear about it, they’re really supportive and want to join, but really our biggest challenge is making sure people hear about it.

What sort of feedback did you get from the restaurants? Did they have any useful suggestions?

The restaurants have been fantastic partners throughout the pilot. We started off with five restaurants and grew to eleven over the summer and fall. So far everyone has been very supportive and surprised by what a light lift it is for them to implement. I’m going to host a meeting with all our restaurant partners in early 2023 to capture feedback and start to think through adaptations and

improvements for next year—but so far, the restaurants seem to be really happy with how this has worked out. And I hear that customers are happy too—customers are thanking our restaurant partners for being part of Island Eats and for the steps they are taking to protect the local environment.

What about the Island Eats members themselves? How did they respond to the pilot program?

More than anything else, people have reached out with gratitude that the project exists. I think for so many of us it’s hard to know where and how to start when it comes to trying to lessen our environmental footprint. I’ve heard from our members that Island Eats feels like something easy they can do to make a difference, and that they love going out and getting takeout without all the guilt that comes with the pile of takeout containers after a good meal. Just as I’m going to collect feedback from the restaurants in early 2023, I’ll also be sending our members a survey. I’m really looking forward to incorporating their feedback to make the program even stronger in the next year.

What is your best-case scenario for how Island Eats evolves?

My goal for Island Eats is for it to become an integral part of the Island’s food economy, widely available across all our food service businesses and accessible to anyone who wishes to make a more sustainable choice. This will take time as we reach more people and add more restaurants—but it’s a definite possibility and I’m working hard to make it a reality.

Longer term, I dream of Island Eats becoming an Island-wide reuse program, not just for our local cafes and restaurants, but for any local food-related business that has packaging needs. Imagine if you could get your farmstand greens in a reusable bag, your pies in reusable boxes, your groceries in reusable containers—the list goes on. That would be incredible and have such a positive impact on our environment.

What are your plans for next year?

2023 will be a big year for Island Eats! We’ll move from pilot program to full implementation and will really focus on getting the word out and making the experience an easy choice for new members. One of the things we’re hoping to introduce in 2023 is an app to take the place of the physical membership token. Right now, folks receive a physical token when they sign up and they exchange that token for their takeout order in one of our bowls. I’d love to move to an app and a tech-enabled system so that it’s easier for folks to sign up on the fly, and so that members can use the bowls whenever they’re out, without needing to remember to carry the token with them. Also, I’ll likely add a handful of new restaurants, especially year-round options—stay tuned!



What's in a Name?

by Woody Filley

Ever notice how the name we give something shapes our beliefs about it? Or guides our actions toward it? Let's talk about "Food Waste." It's a name that makes you think of something no longer useful—a problem that belongs in the trash. But what if we called it something else—say leftovers, or scraps? And what if, instead of taking this "waste" to the dump, we could redirect it somewhere that it can be put to good use. Making this "what if" into a reality on our Island is the overarching goal of the MV Food Waste Committee, which has been successfully working at this challenge since 2015.

Approximately 30% of what we throw away as a society is food. On Martha's Vineyard, the amount is estimated to be about 6,500 tons a year. In the past, this waste went into our landfills; once those filled up and were capped, we started shipping it off Island. In an effort to reduce landfilling and encourage recycling, the state of Massachusetts has instituted various "Waste Bans" that prohibit the disposal of certain materials in the general trash. In 2014, the state added food waste to the ban list, requiring any commercial establishment producing more than a ton of food waste per week to divert that material for processing. Today (as of November 1, 2022), the threshold has been lowered to a half ton per week, causing a much larger portion of businesses—especially on Martha's Vineyard—to be affected by the ban.

Turning unused food—our leftovers—into a valuable resource through composting is the obvious solution, but how will our Island process the hundreds (or thousands) of pounds that the law now requires? What about pests like birds and rats? Will there be foul odors?

Early on, the Committee did a tremendous amount of research, including in-person visits to off-Island facilities, to determine the best method to both minimize these problems and produce a high-quality product. The clear answer was in-vessel composting using a large, rotating drum. Unlike the backyard drums that some of you likely own, these drums are usually 7–10 feet in diameter and 32–60 feet long, capable of handling five to ten tons of material a day. Also,

the controlled environment inside the drum greatly accelerates the composting process, so that the final curing outside the drum takes much less time and is essentially free of odor and pest problems.

To test this out, the Committee worked with Island Grown Initiative to create a pilot project. Thanks to a major donor, IGI was able to purchase a used drum and begin processing food waste at the IGI Farm. It was evident early on that the pilot would be a success. Over the past two years, close to 600 tons of food scraps collected from around the Island have been processed at the farm. Just last year a new manure composting program was added. From these "wastes" (plus the carbon sources, like cardboard, necessary to complete the compost recipe), they were able to produce over 1,000 cubic yards of compost.

While these are admirable achievements, the ultimate goal is to build enough processing capacity to handle all Island food scraps. The pilot system has demonstrated that this type of composting is well suited for the Island, but the existing drum is old, often in need of costly repairs, and any downtime presents an added challenge at the very time we are working hard to expand the food scrap collection numbers. The Committee is in the process of developing a plan for an upgraded in-vessel system, evaluating the financing options, and identifying future sites that could be added in the coming year(s). The IGI Farm site cannot handle this problem alone, but it remains important as the model for the future sites that will be necessary to divert the required amount of food scraps from off-Island disposal.

The Farm to Table movement has become a powerful symbol that we equate with high-quality, locally-grown food. Now we need to complete the circle with Table to Farm. Nourishing our soils that produce these great vegetables and other food stocks is best done using high-quality, locally-sourced materials, not compost trucked in from far away. If you are interested in learning more, or would like to support our effort to reduce the off-Island dumping of food scraps, please contact me directly (woody@mvcss.com) or talk to the VCS office staff about how you can help. Thank you!

Woody Filley is Project Manager for the MV Food Waste Committee, a group of concerned citizens representing local nonprofits (including Island Grown and VCS), town Boards of Health, the MV Refuse District, and guest subject matter experts. He is working under a grant from Vineyard Vision Foundation to promote a local solution to food waste disposal.

Left: The pilot system at the IGI Farm. Food scraps, along with leaves and other carbon sources, are loaded into one end of the rotating drum via a conveyor belt. In the foreground is what comes out the other end five days later—nearly finished compost, with very little odor. (Photo by Woody Filley)

Testimony: Truth Telling on Turf Tussle

For more than six years, VCS has been involved in public advocacy opposing a proposal to install one or more artificial turf playing fields at the Regional High School. Joining with colleague groups and concerned citizens, VCS submitted numerous letters and oral testimony to various boards and committees, beginning with our 2016 support of the project's referral to the MV Commission for review. After so much investment of time and energy, we are cautiously optimistic that last year's denial of the plastic field by the Oak Bluffs Planning Board signals a positive outcome to this long and unfortunate "turf war." Below, find a transcript of our April testimony before that Board (and with any luck, the final word from VCS on the matter!)

"I'm commenting here tonight on behalf of the Vineyard Conservation Society. Our written testimony is in the record, expressing concerns about the environmental impact of this project, in particular the potential for groundwater contamination.

Rather than reading through that letter, though, I want to use my time to address some misconceptions regarding the environmental aspect of this issue.

The first is the idea that there is any division within the island's environmental community regarding whether it could somehow be good for our Island's water to replace natural grass with plastic. At least 12 separate organizations, from pond protection groups to our local food advocates, even to faith groups and social justice advocates, have weighed in against this proposal. The number of environmental groups weighing in in support of it is zero.

Second is the argument that the MVC's DRI review resulted in an endorsement of using artificial turf. The final vote to approve or deny the project as a whole was 10-6 in favor, which is hardly unanimous. But more important, and what is often forgotten, is that there was a vote specifically on the question of whether to allow artificial turf. That vote was tied, 8-8. It is only due to the rules governing the DRI process—that tie votes on conditions for approval count the same as a "no" vote—that the plastic field was able to move forward as part of the project.

Further, the MVC did not in fact find the use of artificial turf to have no negative impacts on groundwater. Quite the contrary. They concluded there were a number of clear negative environmental impacts. Specific to groundwater contamination they found:

...the synthetic field poses a de minimis risk in terms of direct human contact, but that the effects of leaching over time are uncertain...other PFAS compounds beyond those that are currently regulated are likely present in the synthetic products, but it is uncertain how those compounds may affect water quality over time, since there are currently no standardized methods for that type of testing.

The real takeaway message regarding environmental impact though comes from their conclusion:

The proposed development would have a more adverse impact upon the environment in comparison to alternative manners of development.

So, the MVC found that artificial turf was environmentally harmful, and a vote to prohibit its use came out in a tie.

Since that vote, new information has emerged casting doubt on the credibility of the claims of the artificial turf industry. That new information likely contributed to the recent decision by the school committee on our sister island to step back and reevaluate their own plans for an artificial field.

Nantucket's issues are broadly similar to ours: their fields are also in dire need of repair, they're unsafe at times, practice time is being lost, some sports may face a competitive disadvantage, etc. Despite that, the school has decided not to move forward with the turf field because of the environmental concerns of their community.

Back on our island, what VCS knows is that there is an incredibly strong environmental ethic among our young people—the students at the high school, but also those in the lower grades—there's a deep concern about climate change certainly, but also plastic pollution and environmental justice. In fact, it's our students who have really taken the lead in the effort to reduce plastics on our island. To get a sense of their conviction you just have to look at last week's Town Meeting in Edgartown, where a student group finished their effort to get rid of disposable water bottles across the Island. It took four long years and countless meetings across six towns, but they stuck with it.

So one unfortunate result of the installation of a plastic playing field at the high school would be the message it sends to our kids about how seriously we take their commitment to the environment.

The more unfortunate effect would be for any kids who are discouraged from participating in sports—whether due to their own environmental beliefs, or their parents' worries about chemical toxicity. That would be truly sad.

We know that the school officials, administrators, and coaches in support of this project have the best interests of our kids in mind. What we hope is that they will see that this decision is not just about athletic excellence, but also about equity and inclusion. The thing that would encourage the greatest access to sports for all of our kids, while honoring the community's commitment to sustainability, would be to forego the artificial turf, stay with natural grass, and put in the resources needed to make those grass fields safe and playable for all."

Find more VCS testimony (including video where available) on this and other issues at our website under the "Advocacy" heading.

Passings

Last year, VCS and the Island community said goodbye to four shining stars.

As board President in the late 1990s, **Eleanor Graves** oversaw a period of staff expansion, as well as the escalation of VCS's legal defense role. She guided the ship through legal battles over the fate of Herring Creek Farm in Edgartown and Moshup Trail in Aquinah. She also participated in the launch of the Conservation Partnership, a collaboration among private and public land protection organizations that continues to this day.

A vital part of the first generation of VCS Members, **Margaret Logue** was a steadfast supporter of the organization for more than 50 years. In a 2015 interview with oral historian Linsey Lee, she said "I feel sort of attached; I'm a great admirer of what I see happening at VCS."

In the early years, back when VCS was a two-person office, **Judy Miller** served as second-in-command. With her background in community and labor organizing, she set the tone for bold advocacy and aggressive legal defense of land—when we needed it most.

Finally, in December we lost **Doug West**, current board member and one of the most passionate supporters of the mission the organization has known. Doug brought a depth of experience to the board, leading with graciousness and determination across many roles: as VCS Vice President, as an important leader in the development of our most recent strategic plan, and, perhaps most daunting of all, as Chair of the "Save What's Left" working group, tasked with addressing growth and development on the Vineyard. In that role, he took pride in starting an initiative to energize more citizens to serve on local boards, naming them the "VCS Sentinels." Leading by example, Doug was a member of the Chilmark Conservation Commission, in addition to serving on the boards of the new Vineyard Community Lands (formerly Open Land Foundation) and the MV Camp Meeting Association.

We will greatly miss all four, dear friends and conservationists dedicated to protecting our Island.

VCS News Round-Up

GREAT PONDS, EPISODE 1: ON OUR WATCH

Having provided sustenance for generations of Islanders (including countless prior to the arrival of Europeans), the Great Ponds of Martha's Vineyard are an ecological, cultural, and historic treasure. Today, sadly, our most valuable coastal waters are paying the price for humanity's success: the combination of nitrogen pollution, overdevelopment, and climate change threaten their future.

One of the absolute highlights of 2022, then, was the release of **Great Ponds Episode 1: On Our Watch**, the first in a planned three-part film series exploring the causes of—and solutions to—the problems facing our coastal ponds. Beautifully shot by filmmaker (and new VCS board member) Ollie Becker, *On Our Watch* represents the fruits of a collaboration begun over a year ago between VCS and Circuit Arts (previously MV Film Festival).

We were honored to host the premiere of Ollie's beautiful, informative, and moving story at our Annual Meeting in June, followed by eight more screenings throughout the summer and fall. Many thanks are due to the guest experts, especially the staff of Great Pond Foundation (Em-

ily Reddington, Julie Pringle, and David Bouck), who joined Ollie and our staffer Jeremy Houser for the engaging Q&A sessions after the screenings. Thanks as well to all those who came out to see the film, and to those who couldn't make it, please check it out online at our website!



FARMER'S MARKET STAYS AT THE FAIRGROUNDS

In 2020, to allow for social distancing in response to the pandemic, the Farmer's Market relocated from the historic Grange Hall in West Tisbury to the MV Agricultural Society's (MVAS) fairgrounds parcel on Panhandle Road. Though the move was originally made to comply with an emergency order, it turned out to be quite popular with vendors and marketgoers alike, leading to a request by the Farmer's Market organizers to remain at the fairgrounds in 2022 and beyond. However, while popular, making that happen with the Covid-19 restrictions no longer in place was no sure thing.

The fairgrounds parcel, owned by MVAS, is protected by an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) jointly held by VCS and the Town of West Tisbury. Last spring, all three parties worked painstakingly to craft an agreement that would allow for the increased use of the property while respecting the limits outlined in the APR. Impacts on the land were reduced by moving the parking off the field, and the Market activity itself was clustered behind the Hall, providing shade and wind protection for vendors, and producing a more enjoyable overall experience for all. The result was a good outcome, and well-received by the public.

But getting there required deliberation. All the parties agreed that farmer's markets represent a mission-consistent, historically-pursued activity of MVAS. But the legal obligation fell to VCS to parse the literal language of the APR, gauging what is "limited" commercial use, and directly related to mission. We were able to reach a meeting of the minds (and a successful outcome) by producing a mitigation plan that lessened the intensity of use of the parcel due to Farmer's Market



Above: To be successful, a "cut" of the barrier beach must remain open long enough for the flow to become tidal, effectively exchanging the nitrogen-rich water of the pond with cleaner water from the open ocean.

(Tisbury Great Pond, aerial photo by Ollie Becker)

Left: Questions were abundant at the eight *On Our Watch* screening events. (L-R: Emily Reddington, Ollie Becker, and Jeremy Houser; photo by Chelsea McCarthy)

activity. Since the APR was placed on the property over 30 years ago by previous owners Edwin and Jeanne Woods, themselves long-time supporters of both MVAS and VCS, we have cooperated to strike a balance in the use of the parcel—to support local farmers and promote the agricultural spirit of West Tisbury and the Island, while not overburdening the land itself.

MOSHUP SANCTUARY—ONE PIECE AT A TIME

The Moshup Trail Project was launched in 1994 to safeguard one of the last remaining footholds of coastal heathland habitat remaining on Earth. Over the years, legal defense has been a major feature of that work (with one particularly notable example being the repeated litigation efforts by a developer to force access across the conservation land to build a subdivision).

This fall, another strategic parcel came one step closer to being added to the Moshup Sanctuary. Eight years into our work on "perfecting" title to this piece of the puzzle (among others), the ruling by Superior Court Judge Janet Sanders that VCS holds 100% ownership in the parcel brings us very close to securing its permanent protection (Judge Sanders' findings will first be reviewed by the appellate court). Perfected title will make VCS eligible for property tax exemption for the conservation land, removing a financial burden that we are currently carrying.

The bigger picture is that this addition to the Moshup Sanctuary, mostly located on the inside of the sweeping curve of Moshup Trail, complements 2020's tremendous accomplishment by the Land Bank and Sheriff's Meadow Foundation in creating the Squibnocket Pond Reservation on the opposite (south) side of the Trail. Together, those projects have secured for future generations a large and mostly unfragmented swathe of globally rare habitat. The work continues!

VINEYARD LAWNS: LESS IS MORE

The spirit that animates the "Vineyard Lawns" initiative has always been that "less is more": less watering, less fertilizer, and less native habitat converted to grass monoculture will together foster a more

sustainable and healthy Island for all. This winter, on the heels of a report from our colleagues at the Great Pond Foundation identifying fertilizer as the second greatest contributor (after wastewater) of the nitrogen that is harming our ponds, we are working on refining plans to reinvigorate and expand the long-running program. Strategies include pursuing grants to create an educational package for homeowners involving print materials, web resources, and social media; outreach to homeowner's associations; public presentations; and likely collaborations with colleague groups. Bigger picture ideas under consideration include expanding the effort to address related issues of pesticide and herbicide use, and the air quality and noise impacts of internal combustion lawn and landscape tools. Expect to hear much more from the Vineyard Lawns program in 2023!

HOUSING BANK TESTIMONY

In the 2022 Annual Town Meeting season, voters in all six towns passed warrant articles endorsing a real estate transfer fee to create a Housing Bank for Martha's Vineyard. Following that, a Housing Bank Review Committee (HBRC), composed of representatives appointed by each town's Select Board, was formed, tasked with refining the language of the bill prior to delivery to the state legislature.

At VCS, our role is to advocate for the strongest environmental protection language in the bill as possible. We testified to that effect before the HBRC, sharing concerns on issues including energy conservation and the safeguarding of critical land resources. Our input focused on four areas: (1) requesting that the 25% portion of the funding stream intended for building on undeveloped parcels be steered toward the already built environment, in particular town centers; (2) asking for an expanded definition of what is meant by "local ecology"; (3) requesting a prohibition on new construction in state-designated Priority Habitat and on prime agricultural soils; and (4) calling for enhanced energy efficiency standards not just in new construction (which were already in the bill), but for renovation projects as well.

FREE YOUR WATER: NEW BOTTLE REFILL STATIONS

Having already installed nearly thirty water bottle refill stations across the Island, the Take Back the Tap initiative is far from done! The multi-year campaign to reduce the plastic waste associated with disposable water bottles continued in 2022, with the addition of two outdoor units in Tisbury's Veteran's Park, and a new indoor refill station at the Edgartown Library. Keep an eye out this spring for the anticipated opening of more units in Vineyard Haven (Owen Park and downtown), Edgartown (Memorial Wharf), and Oak Bluffs (where a large number are in the

works, including stations on the harbor, by the Steamship, at Post Office Square, and at the Penn and Veira Park fields).

The new units, prominently located in public spaces, come just in time for the implementation of the ban on single-use bottles of water (and soda), which, when it takes effect in Edgartown this April, will cover all six towns. Congratulations again to the students of Plastic Free MV for their Island-wide accomplishment!

For a complete list of refill stations, check out the MV Tap Map at our website. Make sure to bookmark the link so it's handy when you're out-and-about and your water runs out!



COMPREHENSIVE WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT

Down-Island towns are in the process of updating plans for their handling of wastewater, an issue intimately linked with the future development trajectory of the Island. The VCS perspective is that such planning must take great care to balance desires for economic growth with environmental realities. Trudy Coxe (one of the great Environmental Affairs Secretaries our state has had in recent years), was emphatic in her warning delivered at a previous VCS annual meeting: "If you plan for more capacity, future demand will fill that newly-created capacity—count on it." We are encouraged by the statement that emerged from the Tisbury Planning Board in regard to the draft Needs Assessment for their plan (reflecting Ms. Coxe's perspective and our own). They wrote:

The growth projections outlined in the draft Needs Assessment may not be in alignment with the overarching goals of the town regarding quality of life, character, and maintaining a walkable, safe, and rural village feel ... a community that may need to be less reliant on a seasonal economy dependent on satisfying future growth needs ... a low-to-no-growth future scenario should be considered as one of the future scenarios in the Plan.

BURIED TREASURE—BUILDING THE VCS ARCHIVE

In recent months, VCS has methodically assessed, organized, and re-boxed more than five decades worth of its history as an organization. It was a daunting task, combing through a treasure trove including maps, photos, and the personal papers of the pioneering generation of Vineyard conservationists. Tremendously useful is the ability to trace the paper trail of the Vineyard's historic land use fights, where valuable lessons can be found ("those that fail to learn from history ..."). The documents also illustrate the evolution from an office with no staff to the professional non-profit organization the Island knows today.

The challenge now is to find a donor interested in underwriting storage of the archive in a climate-controlled setting where it can be easily accessed. Are you that person?

WAKEMAN CENTER MAKEOVER

Thirty-five years into its existence as a collaborative hub for Island environmentalists, the Mary P. Wakeman Conservation Center was refreshed last year with several important upgrades. The makeover includes roof-mounted photovoltaic panels, air-source heat pumps, and new insulation, which together will improve the working conditions in the building while lowering our carbon footprint. The Conservation Center Trust, named in honor of benefactor Mary Wakeman from Edgartown, was created in 1986 by VCS, Sheriff's Meadow, Garden Club, Trustees of Reservations, and the Open Land Foundation (recently renamed Vineyard Community Lands), who jointly own the land and improvements. Many thanks to the Trust for the much-needed improvements, with special recognition due to VCS representatives Farley Pedler and Marc Rosenbaum, who spearheaded the renovation efforts.

STAFF UPDATE: CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL ED.

Congratulations to two of our staffers, Samantha Look (Director of Advocacy & Education) and Jeremy Houser (Director of Science & Policy) for their selection to the Core Certificate Program offered by the Institute for Nonprofit Practice. Sam completed the year-long course in nonprofit management last year, while Jeremy is currently enrolled as a member of the 2022-23 class. Thanks are due to the anonymous donors who have subsidized the tuition costs, and to Sam and Jeremy for dedicating their time and mental energy toward developing the leadership skills that will benefit VCS now and in the future. Thanks, all!



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Below: "Perception" by Mya O'Neill (11th grade, photography)

First Place winners from the Art of Conservation, 2022 Edition: Climate

