

Edgartown Great Pond removed from impairment list

Opens use for shellfishing, swimming.

By **Brian Dowd** - July 7, 2020



Edgartown Great Pond has been cleared for shellfishing, swimming. — Brian Dowd

Edgartown Great Pond has been delisted from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection's impairment list, clearing the way for shellfishing and recreational use.

Edgartown Great Pond is a Class SA water body and the delisting means that it is now fully approved for shellfishing, following years of water quality sampling by the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries.

"EGP was first listed in 1992 by the DEP, so the delisting in 2020 is a milestone and represents the collective efforts of all those who have been working to preserve and protect EGP," Edgartown Great Pond Foundation executive director Emily Reddington wrote in part. "EGP is a living system, so management techniques must continue to evolve with the changing needs of the pond. Conservation work is never complete as long as the pressures on the system such as nitrogen and warming temperatures continue to increase. It is however good to pause and recognize this achievement."

DEP regularly monitors bacteria counts in the pond. What has changed is the pond has had consistently low bacteria levels — a contrast to other Vineyard ponds.

On May 20, DEP announced approval of the final Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for pathogens on Martha's Vineyard as well as Nantucket and the Elizabeth Islands by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

“The TMDL is a watershed wide bacteria TMDL that was developed as part of a series of watershed pathogen TMDLs initiated in the early 2000s under a grant from the EPA,” Barbara Kickham, TMDL section chief for the Watershed Planning Program at DEP.

The goal of the TMDLs is for bacteria concentrations in impaired estuaries to meet the Massachusetts Surface Water Quality Standards according to its uses such as shellfishing, swimming, or boating, according to a letter from Kickham.

Since the draft TMDL was issued in 2005, there have been improvements through local efforts such as catch basin mapping, stormwater infrastructure needs, and best management practices to facilitate drainage and No Discharge Zones, which prohibit the release of boat sewage into coastal waters. Bacteria and viruses from sewage can be toxic to human and marine life.

Reddington told The Times the delisting is another sign the health of the pond is improving.

“We’re seeing lots of signs of recovery and signs of life in the pond, but our work isn’t done,” Reddington said.

While progress has been made additional management actions such as maintenance of septic systems, education on proper pet waste disposal, increased catch basin cleaning, and street sweeping.

In her letter Kickham says no towns on the Island have urbanized areas regulated under EPA and Mass DEP’s General Stormwater Permit, however the department encourages towns to consider developing stormwater management plans.

Along with Edgartown Great Pond, Menemsha Pond and Oyster Pond are no longer impaired for pathogens. Westend Pond on Cuttyhunk is also included on the no longer impaired list.