

**NORTON POINT BEACH
COUNTY OF DUKES COUNTY
MANAGEMENT PLAN**

adopted April 21, 1992

prepared by Martha's Vineyard Commission

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Norton Point Beach is a barrier beach, located across the mouth of Katama Bay and separating the bay from the Atlantic Ocean. The barrier has a history of extensive use by four-wheel-drive vehicles, commercial and recreational fishery, through access to Chappaquidick Island and beach recreation, as well as nesting, resting and feeding of shorebirds. The barrier has a long history of breach episodes. In most recent history, the barrier has been dramatically altered by Hurricane Bob in August 1991 and the October Storm of 1991. The current condition is that the barrier is closed and runs continuously from Katama to Chappaquidick. There are three areas where stable, well-vegetated dune runs from front to back of the barrier. There are a number of isolated dune segments and areas of sparse vegetation. There are extensive barren areas where there is little or no vegetation. Because there are few well-defined trail areas, vehicular traffic is predominantly uncontrolled and random. Vehicles traverse the entire bay to ocean width of the barren areas.

In development of a management plan for this area, our goals may be identified from a number of existing sources, including various plans and regulations of the Town of Edgartown, Decisions of the Martha's Vineyard Commission designating the Cape Pogue and Coastal Districts of Critical Planning Concern, and the performance standards found in the regulations of the Wetlands Protection Act. These various sources present us with the goals of management of the shellfish resources of Katama Bay, management of the barrier landform as a storm buffer, public access and wildlife management, roughly in that order. An additional goal, apparently based in tradition, is that through vehicular access between Katama and Chappaquidick be maintained. Needless to say, these goals present conflicting management alternatives. The goal of through access, by no means the most important, by its nature dominates the plan. The plan proposes to resolve some of the user conflicts and by no means represents the only selection of alternatives.

GOAL A:

Katama Bay is a prime resource for recreational and commercial shellfishery. Proper management of this resource, including access for harvest, must be considered of premier importance in any plan for the area.

ACTION:

Encourage stabilization of the barrier dune system, in order to keep windborne sand and silt from Katama Bay. Do so primarily by controlling vehicular and pedestrian traffic and by fertilization and planting of vegetation.

ACTION:

Provide pedestrian access to the bay side via an elevated walkway between Herring Creek and the vehicular entrance. Reserve an area at the end of Herring Creek for pedestrian access.

ACTION:

Provide vehicular access to the bay side, between mean high water and the first sign of vegetation or proposed planting, as follows:

from an entry trail beyond the pedestrian area on the western end, approximately one mile in length to end at the posted wetland area;

from an entry trail at the eastern end, approximately one half mile to end at the posted wetland area.

GOAL B:

Norton Point Beach performs the function of a storm buffer. Without this valuable buffer, storm surge would funnel up Katama Bay into Edgartown Harbor, creating extensive property damage and threat to human safety. In order to successfully perform its most important function, the barrier's landform characteristics must be recognized and given due consideration. The barrier must be allowed to migrate landward with the rise of sea level, or it will thin out and weaken under the influences at work which cause migration. The barrier dune system must be allowed and encouraged to develop.

POLICY:

Washover is to be accepted as a healthy component of the barrier's landward migration. In order to accommodate landward migration, washover material is not to be removed from the bay or otherwise disturbed.

POLICY:

Encourage dune stabilization by control of vehicular access. Primary recreational and through access is to be seaward of the primary dune. Travel in this area will least impact the processes of landward migration. Studies have shown this area to be the least subject to damage by vehicular traffic. Travel on the Katama Bay side will be for access only. Through travel will not be allowed on the bay side.

ACTION:

Encourage dune stabilization by control of vehicular access as follows:

Establish primary recreational and through access to be seaward of the primary dune. Signs and other educational promotion will direct drivers to keep at least 10 feet seaward of any dune vegetation. Signs, other educational promotion and possible temporary closure will warn drivers that this area may be impassible at certain tides and times of the year. This route should be closed for the winter, for reasons of personal safety and because of the tendency to drive up on the toe of the dune when the beach steepens and takes on its winter profile.

Define a secondary through route across the interior of the barrier. Although this route will only be needed for times when the ocean side is impassible, it will be open at all times. This route may be marked by short stakes with double-sided reflectors, on both sides of the trail. Drivers will be directed to stay between the markers. There will be no parking in the inland trail area.

Keep bay side vehicular access confined to the two locations detailed in the shellfish section above. There will be no need for through access on the bay side. Signs at the starting points of bay access will warn that the route is a dead end and is strictly for bay access. Education and signage will direct drivers to keep from the intertidal area. At the western end, a solid barrier, such as snow fencing, will keep vehicles from the dune area. At the eastern end, symbolic fencing (such as is used to denote nesting areas) will keep vehicles from the dune area.

Prohibit vehicular travel on the bay side between the two marked access areas. There is a wetland area, approximately .4 mile in length, which is completely unsuitable for vehicular access. It is a low, boggy area, cut through by relict overwash channels from the barrier into the bay. This area is to be marked at its ends by signs and by physical barriers in the form of wooden posts 5' apart.

POLICY:

Vehicles will not be permitted to cross between the bay access and interior trail or between the interior trail and the ocean access area. While cross access is not necessary, it may be desirable and private groups may propose to fund vehicle ramps. Without vehicle ramps, cross access will not be allowed. Cross access by vehicles is not a necessary management component.

ACTION:

Vehicles will be kept from crossing the primary dune at the eastern end by barriers in the form of wooden posts placed 5' apart between the segments of intact dune.

POLICY:

Encourage dune stabilization by restricting pedestrian access. Pedestrians will be permitted exclusive access to an area of approximately .3 mile at the western end of the ocean side and to an area of approximately .2 mile at the western end of the bay side, between the end of the Herring Creek and the beginning of the bay side of the vehicular access, as well as shared access to the vehicular bay side and ocean side access areas. Cross access by pedestrians will be restricted to pedestrian walkways.

ACTION:

Restrict pedestrians to the access areas noted above, by signage, education and enforcement.

ACTION:

Construct pedestrian walkways as follows:

at the western end, between Herring Creek and the vehicular entrance, approximately 800' between Katama Road and the western end of the bay side vehicular access

across the barrier from ocean to bay, at four locations where there is presently stable dune, approximately 300-500' each.

POLICY:

Kite flying will be prohibited. Kite retrieval has potential for trampling of dune areas.

ACTION:

Amend the Regulations Governing Norton Point Beach to include prohibition of kite flying.

POLICY:

Once approved and adopted by the County Commissioners, plan enforcement will be the responsibility of the County Sheriff's Department.

ACTION:

Revise and make available Regulations Governing Norton Point in accordance with the plan.

POLICY:

Promote dune stabilization by fertilization at isolated segments of intact dune and at areas of sparse vegetation.

ACTION:

Fertilize at areas of isolated or sparse vegetation, using 10-6-4 fertilizer (50% slow release Nitrogen) at the rate of 200 pounds/acre/year, in a split application of 100 pounds/acre/year in May and in September.

POLICY:

Plant new beach grass as funds and supplies allow. New planting is not to be a priority over the above listed access control measures. The primary policy for dune stabilization will be access control. Vegetation in areas of established dune vegetation which are disturbed for purposes of access definition will be transplanted to barren areas. The interior bay side will be favored for any new planting. This area will eventually be the primary dune, and it is important to establish a strong root system at its base. Fertilize newly planted areas using the same composition and rates listed above for areas of sparse or isolated vegetation.

GOAL C:

The public is to have access to Norton Point Beach for purposes of recreational and commercial shellfishing and finfishing, for recreational purposes such as sunbathing and swimming, as well as visual access.

POLICY:

Access is to be provided in accordance with the measures listed above under goal B.

ACTION:

Pedestrian and vehicular access areas are to be separated by wooden posts placed 5' apart.

GOAL D:

Rare and endangered shorebirds have a history of nesting, resting and feeding on Norton Point Beach. Their interests need to be considered, as they are under the Wetlands Protection Act. No project, including vehicular or pedestrian access, may have any short or long term adverse impact on their habitat, by law. The habitats of rare and endangered species are to be protected by management.

POLICY:

The County is to continue cooperation with bird programs such as

allowing nesting areas to be fenced and signed.

POLICY:

The eastern end of the barrier has been nested in recent years by the Piping Plover, a rare and endangered species. The Piping Plover likes to have open access to the entire width of the beach, from ocean to bay. The eastern end will be kept free of solid barriers.

ACTION:

At the eastern end, separate the bay access from the dune with symbolic fencing only (such as is used to mark nesting areas), in order to allow bird passage.

ACTION:

At the eastern end, place wooden posts 5' apart between the segments of intact dune. Posts will keep vehicles from crossing the primary dune, while allowing bird passage.

POLICY:

Restrict pedestrians to the bay and ocean access areas.

ACTION:

Construct a pedestrian walkway between the bay and ocean side, at one of the locations of presently intact dunes. Restrict pedestrian cross passage to the walkway.

POLICY:

Dogs are to be kept 500' from birds or nests.

ACTION:

Amend Regulations Governing Norton Point Beach to include restriction of dogs as above.

POLICY:

At this time, the best policy for habitat management of the western end appears to be access control as outlined in Goal B, including solid barriers where necessary. The two large barren areas provide nesting potential and should be kept barrier free for bird passage. However, we have seen that without barriers or dunes or other control, vehicles traverse the entire width of the barrier from ocean to bay. In this case, the benefits of access

control outweigh the benefits to bird access that would otherwise result from keeping the barren areas open. Policy for the two large barren areas must consider traffic control to be of primary importance.

GOAL E:

The goal of maintaining through access for vehicles between Katama and Chappaquidick has been accommodated by the proposed plan, although this goal has no real place in the management plan.

APPENDIX A
GOALS AND SOURCES

I. from The Edgartown Master Plan (1990):

PRINCIPAL GOAL:

To keep Edgartown a community of self-support, livable by people of all walks of life in balance with the natural environment.

NATURAL RESOURCES objectives:

To establish a management policy for town-owned lands and coordinate this policy with other organizations the own or control other natural resources in Edgartown.

To minimize adverse environmental impacts of development on publicly and privately owned natural features and resources.

To protect surface waters, salt marshes, and other coastal zone wetlands which sustain shellfish and provide the base for the shellfishing industry and recreational tourist industry of Edgartown.

To sustain the rich wildlife resources of Edgartown and provide protection for the rare, threatened and endangered plant and animal species.

OPEN CHARACTER objectives:

To develop appropriate public access to open and scenic areas.

BALANCED ECONOMY objectives:

To maintain a quality tourist industry.

To encourage and maintain a viable shellfish industry.

II. from Edgartown Harbor Management Plan (in progress):

GOAL: The primary use of Katama Bay shall be as a shellfishing resource. Protection of water quality for that purpose shall be the principal objective of the Town.

III. from Open Space Plan Edgartown, MA (1979):

GOALS:

protect the vast acreage of surface waters, salt marshes and other wetlands within the town which sustain the shellfish industry and provide the base for the recreational tourist industry of the Town.

sustain the rich wildlife resources of the Town.

SHORT AND LONG RANGE OBJECTIVES:

provide vigorous enforcement of the Wetlands Protection Act (Ch. 131: 40) and the Coastal Wetlands Act (Ch. 130: 105).

coordinate and cooperate with other town boards and encourage them to do likewise in carrying out the objectives of the Plan.

continue to work toward limited access rights to water and beach areas critical to the Town's shellfish industry.

encourage responsible planning and action by appropriate public agencies in the following areas of concern.....g. adequate regulation of vehicular use of beaches...

IV. from Martha's Vineyard Commission Decision Cape Pogue District of Critical Planning Concern (1988):

GOALS:

To prevent damage to structures, land and water as a result of erosion, preserve and enhance the character of views, to maintain the quality of well water, prevent pollution, to enhance and protect recreation uses, to avoid impacts associated with certain recreational uses, to protect the quality of adjacent fin and shell fisheries, to maintain and enhance the fishing economy and to promote and protect wildlife habitats.

V. from Decision of Martha's Vineyard Commission Designating the Coastal District as a District of Critical Planning Concern (1976):

GOALS:

To prevent flood damage, maintain water quality, assure adequate water supply, prevent pollution, promote wildlife habitats, assure the maintenance of cultural and historic sites and values, preserve and enhance the character of views, prevent damage to structures, land and water as a result of erosion, promote economic development of fisheries and related industries, and maintain and enhance the overall economy of the Island.

APPENDIX B
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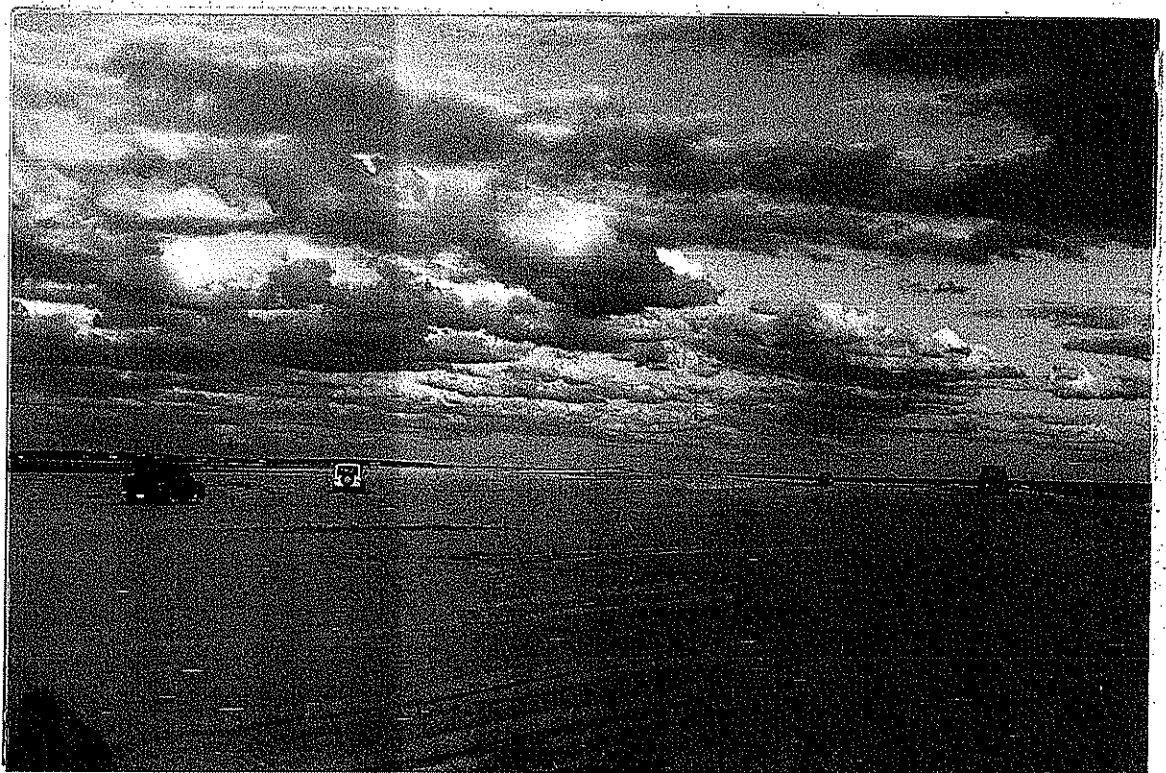
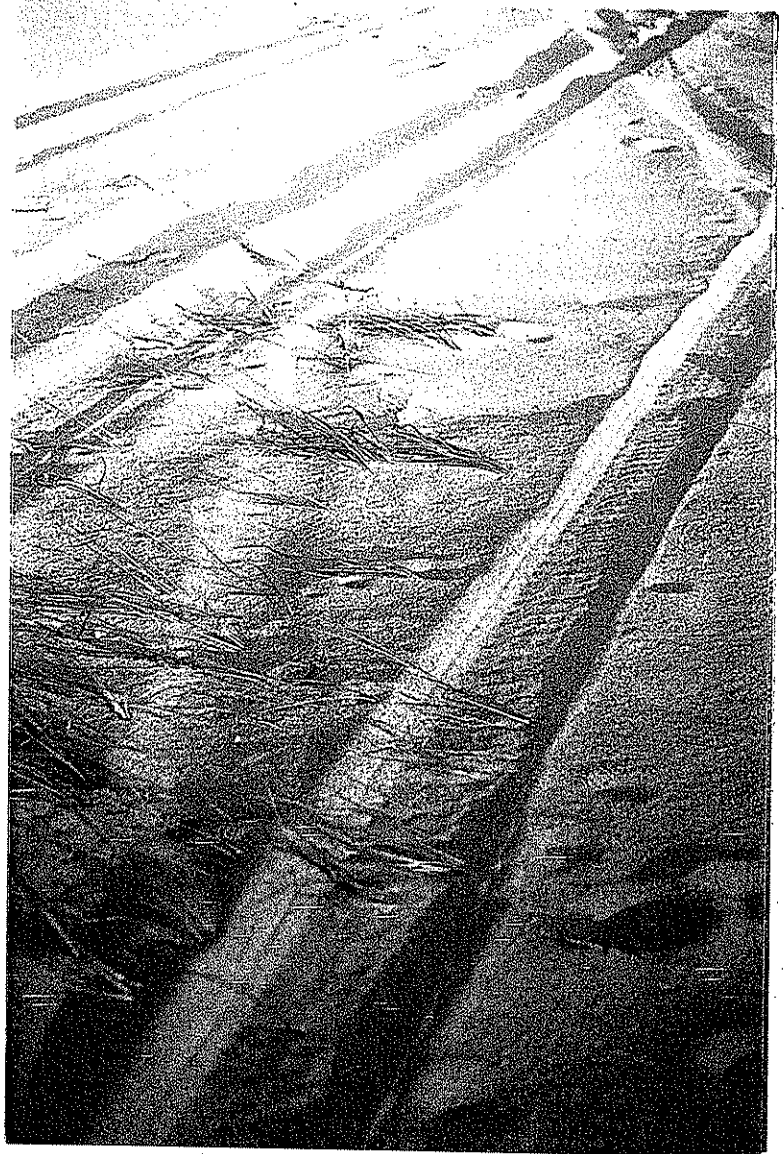
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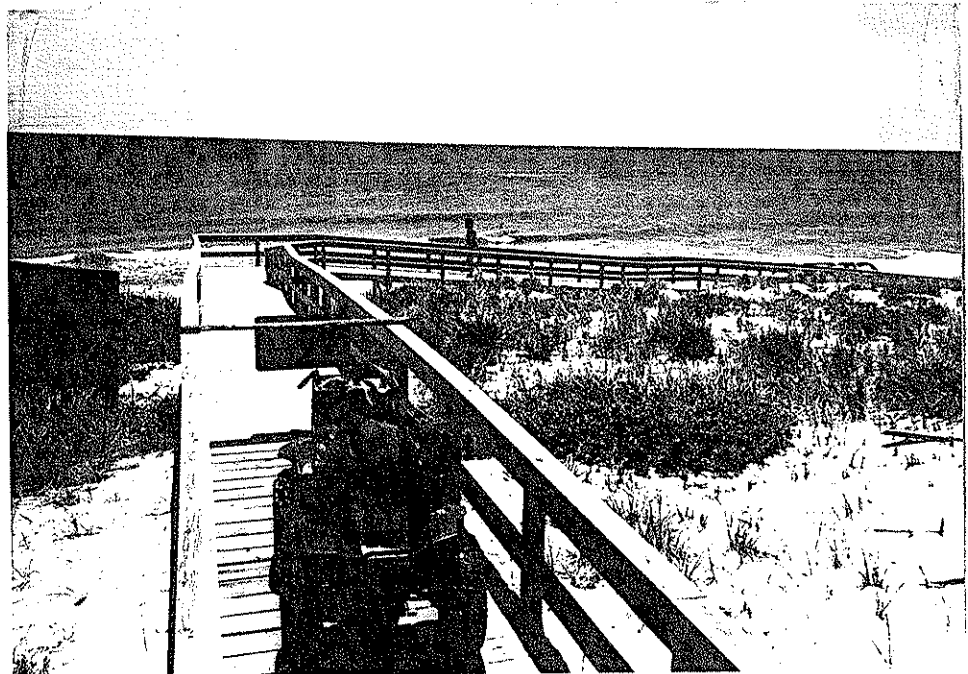
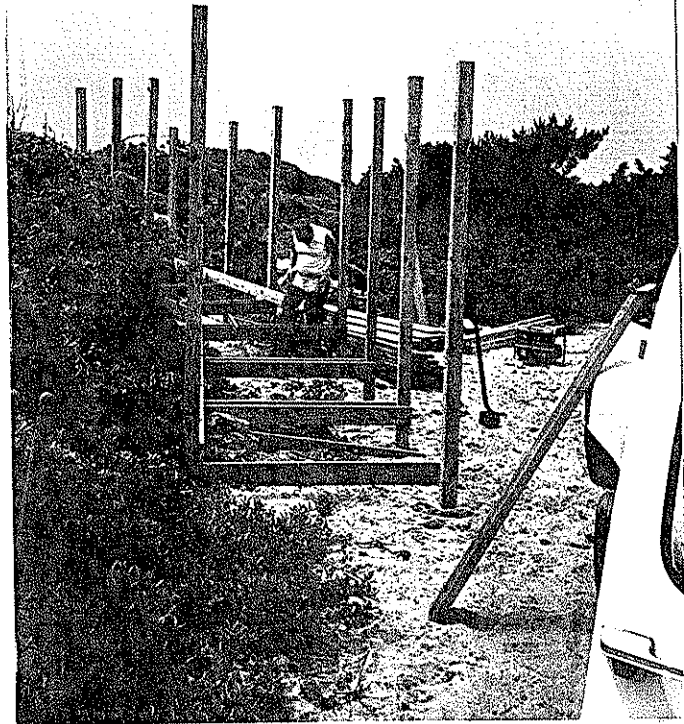
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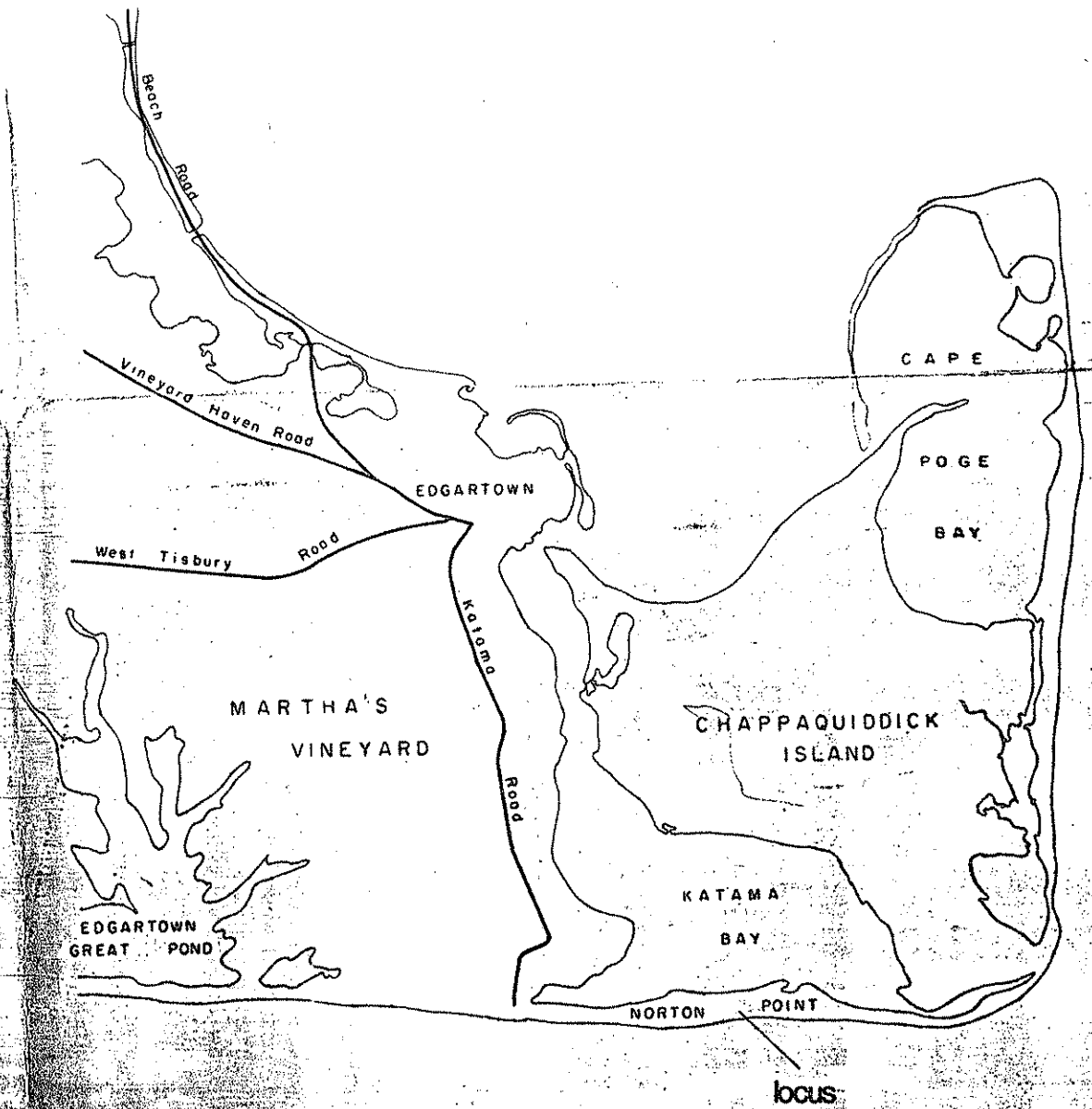
uncontrolled vehicular passage



pedestrian walkways



Photographs and plans courtesy of the Fire Island National Seashore.



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