



## **The Brewster Ponds Coalition: A Brief History**

The Brewster Ponds Coalition (BPC) formally incorporated in October 2014, following a series of community meetings organized by the Town of Brewster Planning Department to discuss pond and watershed protection. Brewster has more pond acreage than any other town on Cape Cod, and water quality is a topic of critical concern for the Town. Our ponds are also an important natural and economic resource for recreation and tourism.

The mission of Brewster Ponds Coalition is to work closely with our community in “Protecting the Health, Beauty, and Enjoyment of Brewster’s Ponds.”

The Brewster Ponds Coalition is recognized as a 501(c)(3) public charity by the IRS, making donations to the organization tax-deductible.

During the three years following the BPC’s formation, this all-volunteer organization has grown substantially. During this time, the founding Board of Directors has organized and led numerous public education programs, built a contributing membership of over 500 donors, and launched several long term projects to advance science-based pond education and protection. And in recognition of our actions, the BPC was recognized with the 2017 Conservationist of the Year award by the Brewster Conservation Trust.

With this very strong start, and the ongoing support of contributing members and volunteers, the BPC Board of Directors recognized the need for a comprehensive plan that will ensure a strong foundation and shape the long term future of the organization.

# Introduction

This Strategic Plan is the product of many months of work by the BPC Board of Directors. Beginning in the Fall of 2017, the planning process included gathering data through member surveys, detailed interviews and consultation with community leaders and other non-profit organizations, and two facilitated planning workshops in the Spring of 2018.

The BPC Board of Directors is deeply grateful for the support of everyone who participated in this effort. This collaborative process expanded the Board's perspective with new ideas, raised awareness of gaps and limitations, and inspired the Board to continue to grow and move forward with the BPC's vital mission. The Board is especially appreciative to those who contributed much time and experience, including a group of 16 volunteer advisors who assisted with the development of the detailed Action Plans. The BPC is particularly grateful to Hal Minis, who generously shared his expertise by facilitating the two planning workshops and provided important guidance throughout the planning process.

Coincidentally, the BPC's planning work took place during a parallel community-wide visioning process during 2017 and early 2018. The Brewster Vision Plan project created a framework that expresses the community's broad preferences for Brewster's future. Of particular note, the Brewster Vision Plan highlights water resources as one of eight interrelated "building blocks" and is a top issue in a survey of Brewster residents.



This Strategic Plan executive summary presents a series of Action Plans developed during the BPC strategic planning process. The purpose of these plans is to ensure that the successes of the last three years will continue and the BPC creates a strong foundation to respond to future opportunities and needs.

# Key Planning Issues

The BPC planning process identified five key issues as essential to continuing progress toward the Mission and the evolution of the BPC from a very successful startup to a long term sustainable organization.

These planning priorities are:

1. **Organization** - Establish the future framework of the BPC, including roles and responsibilities, and build the resources necessary to ensure continuity of leadership and engagement of the Brewster community.
2. **Collaboration and Partnerships** - Develop a network of organizations that the BPC can work with to efficiently advance the overall goal of protecting freshwater resources.
3. **Programs and Education** - Build on the core programmatic functions of the BPC, including adult and youth education, water quality monitoring, events, and other activities that directly relate to the BPC Mission.
4. **Development and Fundraising** - Create the financial capacity for the BPC to fulfill the goals and implement specific plans.
5. **Communication** - Ensure that the BPC effectively communicates all aspects of its work with its members, partners, and the community at large.

# Action Plans

The Action Plans reflect the specific steps the BPC will take to advance each of these key issues. It is important to note that, while these topics are all immediately compelling, actions must be viewed as steps in a long term plan that will shape a multi-year strategy. It is clear that the BPC first needs to build capacity through the Board, volunteer working groups, and finances to implement key actions.

This Executive Summary is an overview of the Action Plans for each priority area. A detailed version of the Strategic Plan, which includes an appendix of examples of specific action items for each priority area is available on the BPC website - [www.brewsterponds.org](http://www.brewsterponds.org).

Planning is an ongoing process and this is not a static document. The BPC will regularly review progress on the Action Plans and, where appropriate, update these activities and timelines so that this Strategic Plan remains a relevant and useful working document over the long term.



# Priority Area - Organization

*Long Term Goal: Ensure a thriving, well-structured organization with the capacity to carry out the Mission of the Brewster Ponds Coalition over the long term.*

## **Summary of Current Status:**

The BPC is an all-volunteer organization currently led by a founding board of seven directors. The responsibilities of this group of dedicated individuals includes planning and executing all BPC programs.

The BPC has also recruited many volunteers who directly participate in programs and other support activities. These talented volunteers' contributions are very important, especially for the Pond Education and the Citizen Scientist Cyanobacteria programs.

However, as the BPC continues to grow beyond its startup phase, expansion of both the leadership role of the Board and the supporting volunteer structure are becoming increasingly important. A well-defined and supported organizational structure with manageable roles and responsibilities is an essential part of the BPC's foundation in the long term

## **Key Objectives:**

- Review, and modify as needed, the current structure of the Board of Directors, including clarifying roles, skills required, and the size of the Board.
- Establish an effective structure of working committees and special project teams of BPC volunteers and Board members to support key functions of the organization.
- Develop and implement a plan to support the existing BPC volunteer organization with paid staff resources to enable the board to shift its focus to organizational leadership.

## **Timeline:**

The Organization Action Plans outlined in the Appendix are a top priority for the BPC. The Board is already working on several of these matters and will begin implementing actions within the next several months, especially those that will determine the organizational structure going forward. While recruiting will require time, filling key positions will remain a high priority, with a goal to add several new board members by the Fall of 2018.



# Priority Area - Collaboration and Partnerships

*Long Term Goal: Maintain and enhance productive relationships with neighborhood and pond associations, Town boards, committees, and staff, as well as with other non-profit organizations.*

## **Summary of Current Status:**

The Brewster Ponds Coalition recognizes that collaboration with others is critical to the success of the BPC mission. In July 2016, the BPC organized the first local “Pond and Neighborhood Summit”, attended by about 50 representatives of these groups across Brewster. BPC Board members have also periodically met with Town officials and boards on specific topics, and with other environmental organizations, including the Association to Preserve Cape Cod (APCC) and the Orleans Pond Coalition (OPC).

However, due to severe time limitations, the Board has been unable to follow-up these actions in a systematic way. The BPC has maintained an informal working relationship with the Brewster Department of Natural Resources, but relationships with other Town departments need to be more fully developed. There have been a few targeted discussions with some neighborhood groups, but there has been insufficient time for follow-up.

The BPC has developed an excellent working relationship with the Association for the Protection of Cape Cod (APCC) through a joint Citizen Scientist Cyanobacteria research project. This program is now in its second year. The scope has been more clearly defined, and the two organizations are sharing resources and volunteers. The APCC also provided speakers for a BPC pond education program during February 2018.

Looking forward, all of these relationships are essential to the BPC in meeting its Mission.

## **Key Objectives:**

- Build ongoing and long-term relationships with neighborhood and pond associations to protect and improve water quality.
- Strengthen communications with town boards, committees, and staff.
- Seek out collaboration opportunities with other non-profit organizations on Cape Cod.

## **Timeline:**

As with most of the planned Actions, the timeline for implementation will be heavily influenced by the BPC organizational capacity. As part of the development of the working committee structure (see Organization), establishing a liaison team to re-establish connections with pond and neighborhood associations will be a high priority, with the intent of holding a follow-up Pond Summit in the summer of 2019.

Moving forward with relationships with Town departments is also an area for ongoing development. The Brewster Town Administrator invited the BPC to periodically attend staff meetings to help ensure strong communication and the BPC expects to provide a briefing for the Select Board in the Fall of 2018.

Other projects identified in the detailed action plan are expected to be implemented during the spring and summer of 2019.

# Priority Area - Programs and Education

*Long Term Goal: Provide ongoing programs that educate and inspire residents to care about and care for the health and water quality of our ponds.*

## **Summary of Current Status:**

Community education has been a hallmark of every BPC activity and program since our founding in 2014. The BPC has organized and held more than 25 public events during this time, including expert speakers on environmental topics, “how-to” programs on pond protection, guided outdoor activities, and family events.

Of particular note are two long term programs: The BPC has developed a partnership with local schools and created a science-based pond education curriculum with lesson plans, classroom kits, and capstone annual spring field trips to a local pond for hands-on study. The Brewster Public schools joined this program in 2018, almost doubling the number of participating students. This program has been very well received by teachers, students, and parents; and the BPC has established a superb volunteer team to support this effort.



The second long term project is an evolving research program with a volunteer group of “Citizen Scientists” to monitor several Brewster ponds for development of cyanobacteria blooms. This program, now in its second year, is a collaboration with the APCC and the Northeast Cyanobacteria Monitoring Program spearheaded by the Boston Office of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The project team is developing a science-based set of analytical tools for predicting and monitoring toxic blooms and educating the community and government leaders about the risks and management of this growing problem.

The BPC previously created a “Pond Waterfront Improvement Guide” as well as a detailed database of stormwater runoff sources in Brewster that may lead to pond contamination. The BPC has shared this information with various neighborhood associations in an effort to promote improvements. This remains an important area of concern limited primarily by available time and people.

Pond environmental education for all age groups is a core function of the BPC mission. Many creative opportunities abound to expand these activities, and the only limitations are time, funding, and human capacity.

## **Key Objectives:**

- Expand the membership and review the structure of the Education and Program Committee in order to effectively provide quality educational and recreational programs.
- Continue to provide the pond education curriculum and field trips to student populations.
- Develop an educational program, “Understanding Our Kettle Ponds - Water Quality and the Health of Our Brewster Ponds.”
- Design programs that educate residents and visitors on topics that promote clean water advocacy in the Brewster community.

## **Timeline:**

Maintaining the two ongoing educational and research functions continues to be a top priority for

the BPC. Planning with the Brewster public schools for the 2019 school year will begin shortly after the completion of the 2018 field trips. The 2018 cyanobacteria monitoring season is underway, and the conclusions and lessons learned from this continuing research effort will be factored into the plan for next year.

Stormwater runoff improvements remain an important area of attention and will be addressed through the network of pond and neighborhood associations in 2019.

Other educational opportunities and events detailed in the Action Plans will continue as time and capacity allow. The practice of the BPC is to include education as part of every activity and event on a year-round basis.

## Priority Area - Development and Fundraising

*Long Term Goal: Develop comprehensive financial resources to sustain the BPC mission and programs.*

### **Summary of Current Status:**

Building financial capacity is a critical function for any organization to fulfill its mission. From its start, the BPC has had outstanding support from the Brewster community with over 500 individuals and families having generously contributed funds to date. This support enabled the BPC to start on a firm financial footing.

However, the founding Board has not had the time or the expertise to pursue other funding channels, such as grants, sponsorships, and other targeted fundraising activities. Recently, the BPC conducted a review of possible additional funding sources, and the Board is encouraged by the number of potential opportunities identified. If successful, these will help with building capacity, providing support for new and existing programs, and possibly a paid staff person.

### **Key Objectives:**

- Build a Development and Fundraising Team
- Develop an overall plan identifying the tools and methods that will be most effective.

The most likely and largest funding sources will include:

- Continued refinement of the annual member appeal
- Top donor efforts/appeals/events
- Grants
- Seek Town funding as a budget line item and/or funds from the new Cape Cod Water Quality Protection Trust
- Business sponsorships
- Merchandising



### **Timeline:**

Establishing a formal Development and Fundraising Team and engaging experienced outside resources to assist with grant applications and potential sponsorships will be among the early priorities. Identifying individuals with expertise will be considered as part of building the BPC Board and volunteer capacity.

Other fundraising events and activities will develop over time as the BPC increases its capabilities.

# Priority Area - Communication

*Long Term Goal: Create a sustainable, managed infrastructure to effectively communicate the BPC Mission, core issues, and pond-friendly practices.*

## **Summary of Current Status:**

The BPC recognized early on that active communication was essential to introducing ourselves to the community. The BPC website was quickly developed as an educational resource and email newsletters now reach over 500 people.

Email is currently the preferred communication medium for BPC activities and is augmented by quarterly e-newsletters, Facebook and Twitter feeds, and press releases to local media outlets. The BPC also publishes marketing collateral as well as our well-received annual appeal publication, Ripples. Ripples is mailed to all Brewster property owners annually and distributed at the Brewster Chamber of Commerce visitor center, the Brewster Ladies Library, Town Hall; as well as at BPC events. Together, these tools have helped put the BPC “on the map” with stakeholders.

To accomplish this, the BPC has developed an outstanding volunteer Communications Team, led by experienced Board members, and includes skilled writers, photographers, designers, and social media experts. This group is a high-functioning team that has worked effectively to promote the BPC’s work. Communications capacity is one of the strongest elements of the BPC organization. The Communications Team is also an important resource for information gathering and identification of messaging opportunities for the BPC.

## **Key Objectives:**

- Create an annual communications plan to organize and schedule communications resources and activities.
- Identify the most effective media channels.
- Recruit, better organize, and recognize BPC Communication Team members.
- Evaluate whether to recruit an intern to work on communications-related activities.
- Create general public awareness.
- Target communications to specific audiences.
- Develop relevant messaging to support core issues.



## **Timeline:**

Although the BPC communication process is working well, the Communications Team plans to increase coordination with other BPC programs and activities to ensure that important information is produced and distributed on a timely basis.

The Communications Team also serves a support function to other programmatic aspects of the BPC, and many of the Action Plans detailed in the Appendix will need to be coordinated with those functions as they develop over time.



P.O. Box 459 • Brewster MA 02631  
[www.brewsterponds.org](http://www.brewsterponds.org)