

# CAPE&ISLANDS

## Brewster Pond Summit to focus on septic impacts

**Heather McCarron**

Cape Cod Times | USA TODAY NETWORK

With warmer weather and the return of the season when algal blooms start developing on the region's ponds, there is renewed focus on Brewster's plentiful water resources.

On Friday, the Brewster Ponds Coalition and the town are teaming up to present the Brewster Pond Summit, which will be held 9 a.m.-12 p.m. at the Brewster Baptist Church, 1848 Main St., Brewster.

Sponsored by Leighton Team, a coalition business partner, the forum will highlight ongoing efforts to protect the town's ponds, with an emphasis focusing on how septic systems affect water quality. Besides discussing the harm to ponds from septic system discharges, the forum will explore current research, what's already been done to fix the problem and what's on tap for the future.

The coalition, one of the Cape's largest and most active freshwater environmental groups, has organized an annual pond summit since 2016, but this is only the second year the town is co-hosting it.

"Previous summits were more focused on educating the members of Brewster's neighborhood pond associations about issues surrounding their ponds. Co-hosting the event with the town strengthens our partnership and allows us to reach out to the entire community," said coalition President Susan Bridges.

Presentations and discussions by town officials and representatives of the Cape Cod Commission, the Massachusetts Alternative Septic System Test Center, and the Horsley Witten Group, LLC, which specializes in sustainable environmental solutions, are planned, with a focus on completed and planned research, proposed Title 5 regulations governing septic systems, and alternative septic systems.

### With summer comes increased vigilance over Cape Cod ponds

The summit is taking place less than two weeks after one of the town's ponds — Walkers Pond — was tagged as showing a "potential of concern" for cyanobacteria on the Association to Preserve Cape Cod's interactive Cyanobacteria Monitoring Map.



**Brewster Ponds Coalition members Marty Burke checks the water clarity in a tube of water brought ashore by Bill Wood, right, at Pine Pond in Brewster on a damp foggy morning, as they collected samples to be tested for cyanobacteria.** STEVE HEASLIP/CAPE COD TIMES

The pond has not been posted with a "Use Restriction" sign at this time, but a generic warning was placed there last week advising people to stay out of the pond if the water develops a scummy or discolored appearance, according to Bridges. Toxic cyanobacteria blooms can pose health risks to people and animals.

The coalition heads many initiatives to promote the health of the freshwater ponds. Projects include scientific research, water quality testing, pond education for children and adults, remediation projects, and many outdoor member activities such as eco paddles, bike rides and hikes, she said.

One such endeavor is the coalition's Citizen Science Program, which detects early warnings for high levels of cyanobacteria that might lead to harmful toxic blooms. More than 50 volunteers collect biweekly water samples from 18 ponds from May through October.

### 'More pond acreage than any other town on the Cape'

According to the coalition, there are more than 80 ponds in Brewster, ranging in size from 0.1 acres to 730 acres.

"With over 2,100 acres, Brewster has more pond acreage than any other town on the Cape," said Bridges.

Six of them have public landings. Additionally, Nickerson State Park in town has more than eight ponds that are publicly accessible. Several of the public ponds, Bridges said, are "great for swimming, including Sheep Pond, Slough Pond, Long Pond and Cliff Pond."

"Many more are also great for kayaking, sailing and boating, allowing engines up to 3hp," she said. "Larger ponds like Long Pond and Cliff Pond allow larger engines. There's also great fishing."

A variety of fish can be found in the ponds, and the state stocks several of them with trout, including Sheep Pond and ponds in Nickerson State Park.

The ponds in town that most frequently experience high levels of cyanobacteria are Walkers, Cliff, Lower Mill, Schoolhouse and Seymour, according to Bridges. Septic systems and other influences contribute to instances of degraded water quality, not only in Brewster's ponds, but in ponds across the region.

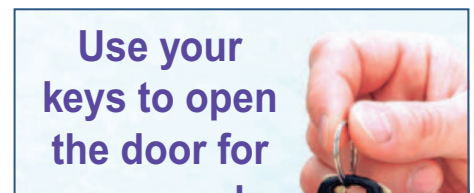
According to Bridges, damage to Cape Cod's freshwater ponds and estuaries is known to come from septic systems, fertilizer and stormwater runoff. Nutrient loading from septic systems accounts for 80-85% of the problem, she said.

### Why the pond summit is so important

This year, the coalition's top priority is to sponsor a town meeting article to fund a townwide comprehensive water resources study and plan to examine nutrient pollution from septic systems.

"That's why this pond summit is so important. We need to educate the community about the current status of our water resources and explain what needs to be

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done, either sewerage or alternative septic systems, or a combination of both, so that they will be willing to fund the study and, more importantly, fund the projects needed to address the problem,” Bridges said.

Other priorities this year, she said, “include continuation and expansion of water quality testing and scientific research and working with neighborhood groups and the town on stormwater and other remediation projects.”

Town Manager Peter Lombardi said the town has long emphasized “a holistic approach” to protect its water resources.

“As new technologies and strategies emerge to address water quality, especially in our freshwater ponds, Brewster continues to lead on these issues as evidenced by our recent work with the Brewster Ponds Coalition on our Water Resources Task Force and other regional initiatives,” he said.

With the state proposing significant changes to its Title 5 septic and watershed regulations, Lombardi pointed out, “the need to work together has never



**Bill Wood on Tuesday fills a skim net that is dragged across the water surface at Pine Pond in Brewster to collect a sample that will be tested for cyanobacteria. Wood volunteers with the Brewster Ponds Coalition, which samples 19 ponds in the town.** STEVE HEASLIP/CAPE COD TIMES

been more critical.”

Friday’s summit is open to town and area residents and is free to attend in person, or remotely via livestream. A link for remote access is provided on the Brewster Ponds Coalition website. To register for the forum, visit <https://tiny->

[url.com/BPC-2023-Pond-Summit.](https://tiny-)

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