

Governor Baker Certifies Plan to Address Cape Cod Water Quality Issues

'208 Plan' Brings Cape Cod Commission, Communities Together to Find Water Quality Solutions

BOSTON – In support of a significant Cape Cod water quality initiative, Governor Charlie Baker has certified a plan, developed by the Cape Cod Commission (CCC), aimed at both addressing Cape Cod water quality issues, and restoring those waters to levels where they are able to meet state water quality standards.

In a letter to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Governor Baker certified the Water Quality Management Plan for Cape Cod, also known as the “208 Plan” (named for a section of the federal Clean Water Act), and has submitted it to EPA for review and approval by September.

Once approved, the Plan will be implemented by the CCC and individual Cape Cod communities to address the problem of excessive amounts of nitrogen pollution, primarily from septic systems, discharged into the water bodies and estuaries on Cape Cod. The Plan will facilitate development of the most effective and affordable solutions to the problem, tailored to local needs.

“Nitrogen pollution in Cape waters affects not only the natural resources, but the economy and quality-of-life there too,” said Governor Charlie Baker. “The Plan is designed to empower Cape Cod citizens and officials to design and develop solutions that work for their communities – rather than having solutions imposed on them by outside parties or the federal government.”

With Commonwealth support, the CCC spent more than two years drafting the 208 Plan. The Plan was written after an extensive public participation process that included numerous public meetings across the Cape and input from hundreds of residents, community officials and stakeholders.

The Plan examines the causes of water quality issues on Cape Cod and provides more options for communities to consider and new planning tools to use in making local decisions about potential solutions. It offers greater flexibility and discusses financing and funding options to help implement those solutions. Additionally, the Plan:

- Encourages communities to share systems to reduce costs;
- Provides analysis and planning tools, such as GIS mapping, to see if alternatives to large sewer systems and sewage treatment plants can work in a community;
- Supports the potential use of enhanced septic technologies; and
- Backs the use of natural solutions in areas near the water’s edge, such as wetlands, to help absorb nitrogen.

The Plan recommends continued support through loans and other forms of assistance from the State Revolving Fund’s Clean Water Trust. Every year, the Trust provides millions of dollars in low- or no-interest loans to communities that seek to construct or upgrade wastewater treatment systems.

A key element of the 208 Plan will be the implementation of the Cape Cod Water Quality Monitoring Initiative, which will involve four years of extensive water testing at stations situated along Cape Cod Bay, Buzzards Bay and Nantucket Sound. This initiative will be funded by \$250,000 per year allocated over four years by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs and will be equally matched by funds appropriated by Barnstable County.

“This 208 Plan reflects a significant effort to address a serious environmental problem on the Cape,” said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Matthew Beaton. “To help the Commission and communities begin this important work, we are committed to funding the water quality monitoring initiative to ensure that the community efforts can be measured and are effective.”

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) administers the statewide water quality management planning process, and MassDEP recently completed an extensive review of the 208 Plan, and found that it will help waterways meet state water quality standards. To support the Plan, the Governor has directed MassDEP to develop a watershed-based permitting program to provide communities flexibility in their efforts to address water quality issues in their watersheds.

“MassDEP is committed to a Cape Cod watershed permit that will foster local flexibility, support adaptive management when deciding on a solution and choosing appropriate timelines for an undertaking of this size and complexity,” said MassDEP Commissioner Martin Suuberg, “and we will continue to work closely with the Commission, the communities and all interested citizens to implement these solutions.”

“The 208 Plan is a true community effort that reinforces local control and decision-making in dealing with our greatest environmental challenge,” said Cape Cod Commission Executive Director Paul Niedzwiecki “and the regulatory reforms promoted by the Plan will significantly lower the cost of compliance.”

[The 208 Plan](#) must receive final approval by EPA Region 1 before its recommendations can be implemented by the Cape Cod Commission and Cape communities.

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