

Volunteer

Chatham Water Watchers: Water samples are collected in Chatham's estuaries five times per summer at biweekly intervals during July and August and once in early September. Volunteers are trained to directly assess water quality by measuring water clarity, salinity, dissolved oxygen content and temperature and then to collect water samples that are chemically analyzed by the School of Marine Science and Technology at UMASS, New Bedford.

To volunteer, contact George Olmsted (gmolmsted@aol.com; 508-945-9954);
Martha Stone (mleeb@comcast.net; 508-945-2716).

In 1994, the State Executive Office of Environmental Affairs endorsed a Stage Harbor Management Plan approved by Chatham Town Meeting. Chatham's plan was the first to be adopted by a Massachusetts town.

The Friends of Chatham Waterways provided much aid in the development of the Stage Harbor plan that called for the design of a water quality-monitoring program and efforts to better understand and manage wastewater from homes, businesses and storm water runoff. Working with the Director of Chatham's Water Quality Lab, Dr. Robert Duncanson, Ph.D., FCW implemented a program in 1999 that became the Chatham Water Watchers.

In September 2009, Chatham Water Watchers completed their 11th year of testing and sampling water quality at 12 stations in 10 Chatham estuaries (places where fresh waters and coastal salt waters meet and mix). In earlier years, when data was needed for the initial wastewater management planning, we had as many as 150 Water Watchers working at 25 stations around town. The data collected was critical input for the Massachusetts Estuaries Project (MEP) for Chatham. The Total Daily Maximum Loads of nitrogen for each estuary developed by MEP is part of the basis of Chatham's Comprehensive Waste Water Management Plan that will guide our implementation of sewerage and centralized and satellite-plant treatment of waste water to remedy our degraded waterways.

Since it is important to monitor water quality over a long period, Chatham Water Watchers will continue their work over the years ahead. Once we begin to treat more of our wastewater, we'll need to continue monitoring to assess our progress against algae, low dissolved oxygen and decayed bottom sediment – the contributors to the loss of plant and animal species that define our current degraded waterways.