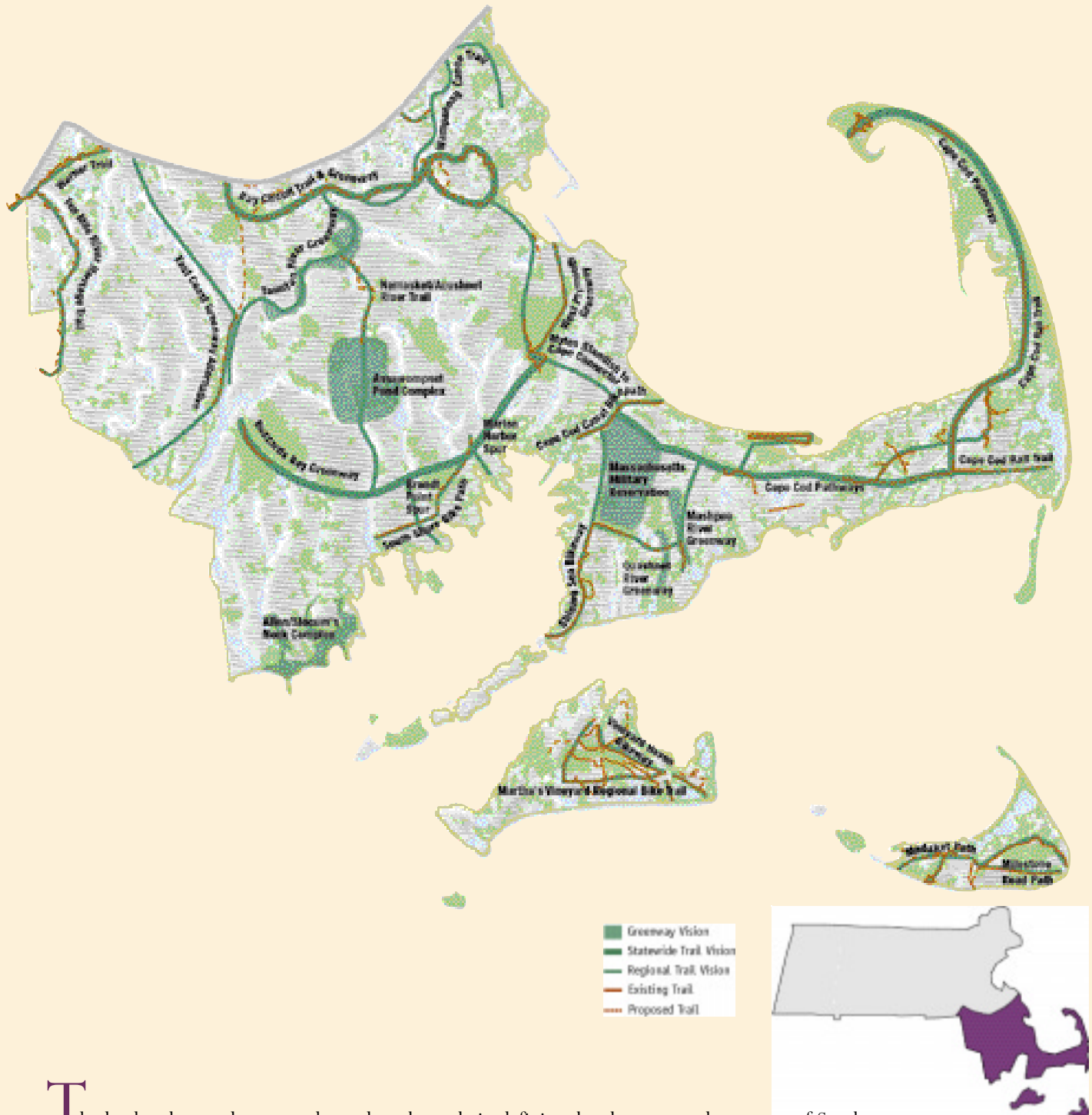


Southeastern Massachusetts



The land and natural resource base play a key role in defining the character and economy of Southeastern Massachusetts, Cape Cod and the Islands. Sandy beaches, tidal marshes, cranberry bogs, pine barrens, rural villages, urban centers, scenic rivers and a growing network of walking and bicycle paths make this region a popular place to live and play. This landscape also supports the highest density of rare and endangered species in New England, and includes globally rare coastal plain ponds. The North River, the only state designated Scenic River, and the Taunton River are natural treasures with rich history. The Bay Circuit, one of the state's oldest and grandest greenways, the Warner Trail and the Cape Cod Rail Trail provide recreational opportunities for residents and tourists alike.



The Taunton River north of Route 44. Advocates are working to create a water trail and increase public awareness of this underappreciated natural treasure. (Kathy Sferra)

However, unplanned growth is fragmenting the very landscape which makes this region an appealing destination. Open land is being converted to residential and commercial uses, threatening the integrity of fragile natural systems and putting tourism and agriculture — two major land-based industries — at risk. Citizens are working hard to protect key natural features and to secure a meaningful greenway network within a developing landscape while it is still possible. Priority actions are outlined below:

Create greenways along priority river corridors for resource and habitat protection, public education and as community ‘connectors.’

The Taunton River Greenway is one priority where advocates are working to conserve land along the river and increase public awareness of its natural and archeological significance. Efforts are underway to create an on-river “water trail,” enabling the public to experience and learn about the river first hand. This water trail is part of the Wampanoag Canoe Passage,

a 70-mile canoe trail that tracks the historic route of the Wampanoag Indians from Massachusetts Bay to Narragansett Bay, and connects the North and Taunton rivers. Preserving this pre-colonial passage and the rivers it connects is another regional priority.

Link protected open spaces and parks for conservation and recreation.

Stretching from Fall River to Plymouth, the Buzzards Bay Greenway is envisioned as an open space corridor and walking trail that will link the Southeastern Massachusetts Bioserve, Freetown Fall River State Forest, the Acushnet Cedar Swamp, Haskell Swamp Wildlife Management Area and Myles Standish State Forest with a number of smaller conservation areas in the region. When complete, this major east-west greenway will connect 10 communities, protect important resources and anchor many local greenway efforts including trail spurs to the coast. While well underway, much is yet to be done to achieve these ambitious goals.



The Shining Sea Bikeway in Falmouth. (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy)

Protect and expand existing trail corridors and networks.

A top priority is to complete the southern section of the 200-mile Bay Circuit Trail and Greenway to protect trail continuity and the natural and cultural resources along its route. Although 150 miles have been permanently protected, significant gaps remain. Enlisting the support of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) is essential to securing the segments it controls, and to creating connections between the greenway network and the mass transit system — also a regional priority.

The popular Cape Cod Rail Trail is another priority. Here DEM is working to make vitally important improvements to the existing trail. Advocates are working to expand the rail-trail from Harwich through Chatham, and to identify a potential route through Dennis, Yarmouth, where the Executive Office of Transportation and Construction (EOTC) has provided a portion of the right-of-way, and Barnstable.

A fourth priority is to permanently protect the Warner Trail, a 35-mile hiking trail from Canton to Rhode Island's Diamond Hill State Park. Currently, only 11 miles of this critical corridor are protected. The remainder must be secured to ensure its continuity and firmly establish it as a “spine” of the regional trail network.

Cape Cod Pathways, the Ten Mile River Heritage Trail, and a multi-town municipal bikeway effort on the south shore were also identified as priority trail efforts, each with its own challenges and in need of additional support.

Develop information and technical support for greenway and trail efforts.

Better data and technical information are needed to effectively plan and protect critical greenways and trails. Advocates recommended creating a “greenway clearinghouse” and requested a staff position to coordinate region-wide greenway efforts.

This region offers many other unique greenway opportunities. Efforts to open up portions of the 8,000-acre Assawompset Pond Complex for passive recreation would create a key link between the Taunton River and Buzzards Bay greenways. Advocates also envision connecting the Bay Circuit with Cape Cod Pathways through Myles Standish State Forest, linking over 300 miles of trails and over 15,000 acres of open space. On the same scale, a recent management plan for the reuse of 15,000 acres of the Massachusetts Military Reservation calls for large scale conservation, and considers the possibility of a trail network which could eventually link the reservation with Cape Cod Pathways and beyond. These large scale projects underscore the value of creating linkages and exemplify the synergistic effect creating greenway networks can have.



An American Bald Eagle. The Assawompset Pond Complex is one of the only year round nesting sites in Massachusetts for this endangered bird. (Terry Blunt)

Cape Cod Pathways — Connecting people and places

The proposed 100-mile Cape Cod Pathways network is an excellent example of cooperation among federal, state, town and tribal officials, non-profit organizations and private land and business owners. The result is a network of walking trails that, when complete, will protect and showcase the diverse natural scenery and cultural treasures of the 15 Cape Cod communities. The proposed Pathways network links several existing local trails once considered assets only for the host community.

A project of Barnstable County, coordinated by the Cape Cod Commission in cooperation with The Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts and the National Park Service Rivers & Trails Program, the coalition-based effort first envisioned a system of pathways traveling across the Cape, and then identified gaps needing protection. In 1995, an eight-day hike of the proposed cross-Cape trail

network attracted significant public support. That support has continued to grow thanks to annual “Walking Weekends” sponsored by nonprofit organizations working with the Commission, municipalities, and the National Park Service. With 50 to 60 miles of dedicated trail on the ground, the Pathways network is within reach.



The Cape Cod Rail Trail. (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy)



Hikers explore the Outer Cliffs during a Cape Cod Pathways “Walking Weekend.” (Kathy Sferra)