



Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions

protecting wetlands, open space and biological diversity through education and advocacy

By email to erosion-commission@state.ma.us

April 7, 2015

Coastal Erosion Commission
c/o Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management
ATTN: Coastal Erosion Commission Report
251 Causeway Street, Suite 800
Boston, MA 02114

Re: Coastal Erosion Commission Draft Report

Dear Coastal Erosion Commission Members:

The Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions (MACC) submits these comments on the Coastal Erosion Commission Draft Report of January 2015. We recognize and appreciate the hard work of the Coastal Erosion Commission and of stakeholders and other experts who have been involved in the process leading to the draft report.

MACC is the professional association of Massachusetts conservation commissions. Almost every conservation commission in Massachusetts is a member of MACC. Conservation commissions, part of each municipal government, protect the natural resources of their communities under the Conservation Commission Act (G.L. c.40, § 8c) and administer and enforce the Wetlands Protection Act (G.L. c.131, § 40) and municipal wetlands laws and regulations in their communities. We protect wetlands, open space, and biological diversity across Massachusetts through education and advocacy and support of conservation commissions. We advocate for strong science-based laws, regulations, and policies, and laws that function well. MACC has been doing that work for more than fifty-three years.

We are submitting brief comments because we learned of the draft report only recently and have not had the opportunity to do an in depth review of the report before today's comment deadline. In this letter, we discuss the report's recommendations and the essential role of state and local wetlands laws and regulations in protecting coastal resources.

With predictions of rising sea levels and more frequent damaging storms in the decades ahead, we expect the coast will suffer more damage and coastal beaches and shorelines will be more important contributors to protecting valuable coastal and inland resources. Understanding and taking advantage of natural coastal processes to maintain the ability of coastal landforms to provide storm damage protection and flood protection will be essential. We encourage the Coastal Erosion Commission to focus on those naturally-occurring and beneficial processes, understanding that costly engineered structures used to stabilize shorelines will cause detrimental impacts on the amount of sediment available, increase erosion rates in adjacent areas, and in most circumstances exacerbate the problems.

We are in general agreement with the recommendations of the report. We think they strike a good balance among science, information, and data; legal and policy issues; and shoreline management,

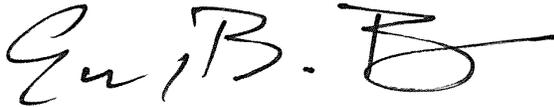
assistance, and outreach. We agree that more information and data would be very helpful and also agree that enough information and data currently are available to proceed with the other recommendations of the report.

Our expertise includes the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act (WPA), which has played an essential role in protecting coastal resources and will continue to do so. We agree with the Coastal Erosion Commission's finding that "the WPA is effective at protecting wetland resources and ensuring that the beneficial storm damage protection and flood control functions of these resources are maintained." (Draft Report, page 5-4.) We agree that change to the WPA is not required to protect coastal resources and that the WPA, especially with recent revisions to the regulations, provides adequate opportunity to test new and innovative pilot projects in coastal resource areas.

We agree with the recommendation that DEP adopt wetland regulations and performance standards for Land Subject to Coastal Storm Flowage (LSCSF). We have been participating in the DEP Advisory Group on that issue. LSCSF can play a vital role in protecting the natural functions that allow dunes to migrate and coastal landforms to provide storm damage protection and flood protection. At a minimum, the performance standards for LSCSF must provide for flood protection as well as protection of natural systems and habitats. We think the Coastal Erosion Commission report should also recommend that sea level rise of between two and six feet, as widely predicted for our coast this century, be incorporated into the regulations for LSCSF. The regulations should address predicted changes in the spatial extent of coastal wetlands and of LSCSF and the depth of expected flooding. To do otherwise would be to ignore the science to our detriment.

We look forward to the next step in the process and are available to assist in reviewing potential actions that may affect conservation commissions, including implementation of the Wetlands Protection Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eugene B. Benson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "E" and "B".

Eugene B. Benson
Executive Director
Email: eugene.benson@macweb.org