

Wetlands Protection for Wildlife Habitat

Wildlife Habitat, in our conservation lands and in our neighborhoods, are areas with plants and water, that provide shelter, food, growing conditions, nesting or breeding sites for the preservation of wildlife. Wetland resource areas such as ponds, brooks, marshes and vernal pools are very important to safeguard because they provide wildlife habitat and support fish and shellfish. Wetlands also help prevent storm damage and pollution, reduce flooding, and protect groundwater -Acton's drinking water! Acton Wetlands Bylaws defines wildlife as including all mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrate animal species. This includes any state- or federally-listed endangered or threatened species, or "species of special concern".

Protection of Wildlife is one of the eight interests of the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act (WPA). In 1986 the Massachusetts legislature recognized that wetlands can provide wildlife habitat and added "wildlife habitat" to the list of interests protected under the Wetlands Protection Act, M.G.L. c.131, §40. The following year, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) revised the Wetlands Regulations (310 CMR 10.00) to incorporate protection of wildlife habitat as a wetlands interest and adopted standards and procedures to protect important wildlife habitat functions in wetland resource areas. In 1996, the Rivers Protection Act was adopted, providing additional requirements for habitat protection under the Wetlands Regulations. Both the WPA and the Town of Acton Wetlands By-laws serve to protect resources and control activities that could possibly pollute or damage wetland values. Acton's by-laws, like that of many cities and towns are more strict than the State WPA (310 CMR 10.0). The regulatory process begins when new work is proposed in close proximity to a wetland. The work may be residential backyard projects such as a deck, pool or septic system; or municipal projects such as rail trails, or major commercial projects such as housing and retail developments. Inland wetlands and waterways are divided into their component parts such as: land under water, riverfront area, streams, bordering land subject to flooding, and bordering vegetated wetland.

The Acton Wetlands By-law sets forth the Conservation Commission's authority to establish procedures and regulations relative to the Town's local bylaw and provides guidance by setting boundaries that limit project scope and provide conditions for work within wetland "resource areas." The Conservation Commission meets twice monthly at Acton town hall, and the public may review proposed projects. To read the Acton By-law, visit <http://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/341> known as Chapter F- Environmental Protection.

Do you have questions about whether or not you have wetlands on your own property? Any Acton resident who is planning a project on his/her property may request the Conservation Commission to make a determination (*Determination of Applicability*) as to the precise boundaries of a resource area, including the buffer zone. A buffer zone refers to that area of land that extends 100 feet horizontally outward from what is often referred to as a "setback" or boundary line. Acton By-laws require that there be a 50 foot natural

vegetation or “no disturbance” zone. Additionally, new construction is not allowed any closer than 75 feet to that boundary line. If some types of land project needs to occur within 100 feet of a wetlands, the property owner must seek a WPA permit via the Conservation Commission. For more information, visit Natural Resources at Town Hall and ask for the brochure: ***The Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act~ How it Protects Our Wetlands, Floodplains and Riverfront Areas - What Property Owners Need to Know.*** While you are there you can pick up a FREE WildAware button!

The WildAware film is ready to view!

The WildAware film was produced by Acton Community Access Television. To watch the film, the YouTube link will be posted on both the Acton WildAware Facebook page, www.facebook.com and the ActonTV Facebook page. You can also find the WildAware film at www.youtube.com by searching ActonTV and visiting the Education and Public channels. Here is the schedule of show times now and for the next few weeks:

On the Education Channel (Comcast 9 Verizon 40) WildAware will air at:

3:30 PM Mon-Fri
10:00AM Sat & Sun
8:00PM Mon, Wed, Fri

On the Public Channel (Comcast 8 Verizon 45) WildAware will air at:

6:00AM Daily
8:00PM Tue & Thu
4:00PM Mon, Wed, Fri

Paula Goodwin is a member of the Acton Conservation Commission who introduced WildAware with Acton Natural Resource Assistant Bettina Abe. WildAware is a program sponsored by the Town of Acton Natural Resources Department that began in September and will continue through the summer of 2016. The purpose of WildAware is to educate the community about the existence and habits of wild creatures, and the goal is increased community awareness of shared habitats. For information, call 978-929-6634 or send email to nr@acton-ma.gov.