



TOWN OF YARMOUTH

Conservation
Commission

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Yarmouth Conservation Commission Seaweed Management Policy

Seaweed provides important habitat and a critical source of food for marine animals. Plant debris deposited on the shoreline also provides important nutrients and organic matter for the ecosystem. Organic matter in the wrack line (the area where items from the sea are deposited on the shore between high and low tides) provides food and habitat for small crustaceans and a number of other species, which then provide food for fish, crabs, and nesting and migrating birds. The wrack line also catches sand that helps build up beaches and dunes, important for storm damage protection and flood control. Accumulations of seaweed on beaches, however, can cause management challenges, particularly in warmer weather when the material decays and causes odor and fly problems.

Removal of seaweed should not be required under normal conditions. Seaweed left behind by the high tide is regularly removed by the following tide cycle dependent on the direction of the wind. If regular beach raking is desired, by hand or machine, A Notice of Intent application must be filed with the Yarmouth Conservation Commission, and an Order of Conditions permit must be obtained prior to any activity.

Emergency Procedure for Seaweed Management

In the event of extreme volumes of seaweed accumulation, that is deemed to create a public health or safety concern, the following procedures are set forth.

In accordance with the Town of Yarmouth Wetland Bylaws, a written or oral request shall be made to the Conservation Commission, and if oral, must be confirmed in writing within 24 hours of work commencing. The Town of Yarmouth Conservation Commission will consider approving seaweed removal from areas seaward of the daily high tide line only if the presence of the seaweed is persistent and deemed a public health or safety issue that has been identified as such by the appropriate town official (either the Director of the Board of Health or Chief of Police). The official must provide, in writing, a declaration that states the conditions at the beach constitute an official public health or public safety emergency and must state the reason(s) why the project is necessary for the protection of public health or safety. A simple majority of the Commission is required to certify the work as an emergency project to be performed only for the time and place certified by the Commission for the limited purpose of abating the emergency. A front-end loader may be permitted to carry out emergency cleanup of seaweed between a point immediately below the berm crest and the Mean Low Water Mark (MLW). Individuals carrying out emergency cleanup shall make all reasonable efforts to remove as little sand as possible from the beach. At no time shall front-end loaders or other mechanical devices used in the emergency cleanup, ever operate below MLW.

Although seaweed is a natural material, once it is removed from a beach, disposal can pose some challenges. A disposal strategy shall be developed by the applicant and agreed on by the Conservation Commission. Disposal strategies will vary depending on space available for storage and drying of seaweed, the amount of material to be disposed of, the resources available for disposal, and ecological impacts.

Nesting Habitat

Many of the beaches along the Nantucket Sound are listed as NHESP Priority Habitat for Rare Species and provide important nesting locations for both Piping Plovers and Least Terns, both of which are protected by state and federal regulations. Areas within this habitat must comply with the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MESA) regulations, and raking must meet an additional list of standards. The Notice of Intent application is required to be forwarded to MESA for their review during the application process.