



Opinion

Herring River restoration project vital to addressing climate change

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Climate change is real, especially for those of us on Cape Cod who see the eroding cliffs and frequently flooded low roads. We can't get away from the consequences, but we can mitigate existing infrastructure.

Last year, the towns of Wellfleet and Truro convened a stakeholder workshop to consider the threats of climate change. The workshop concluded that addressing climate change is urgent because its effect "threatens the built environment, drinking water aquifer, biodiversity and natural resources." Restoration of salt marshes was identified as a top recommendation to improve community resilience to these threats.

In Wellfleet that means replacing the existing Chequessett Neck Road dike with a modern bridge and tide controls that will allow the tides to return to the degraded Herring River estuary. Tidal flow will be returned incrementally with comprehensive monitoring and adaptive management.

Restoring tides to Herring River will advance resilience to climate change on several fronts. Restored salt marsh will provide a natural buffer to coastal storms. The return of natural sediment flow will allow the marsh surface to keep pace with sea level rise. Importantly, restoration will replace existing methane-emitting freshwater wetlands with carbon-absorbing saltwater wetlands, thereby contributing to a reduction of greenhouse gases.

Responding to climate change will require a multifaceted approach. The Herring River restoration project's science-based design involving more than a decade of input from a broad array of community stakeholders is a vital part of the strategy.

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