

May 15, 2002

Contact: Carole Ridley

Alliance Coordinator

Tel. 508 430 2563

Fax 508 432 3788

E-mail cr@ridleyandassociates.com

For Immediate Release:

PLEASANT BAY ALLIANCES PROVIDES TOWNS WITH GUIDELINES FOR PERMITTING MARSH WALKWAYS AND STAIRWAYS

Harwich, MA. The Pleasant Bay Alliance recently announced the completion of *Guidelines for Private Walkways and Stairways in Fresh and Marine Resource Areas in Pleasant Bay*. The guidelines are being submitted to conservation, planning, and building enforcement officials in the Alliance communities for their use in the review of permit applications for walkways or stairways over marine or freshwater wetland resources.

“These guidelines represent state-of-the-art thinking about the benefits and impacts these structures can have in wetland resource areas, and we are strongly urging the local authorities charged with reviewing, permitting or enforcing the regulation of walkway and stairway structures to implement the guidelines through their respective policies and regulations,” said Arnold Henson, member of the Alliance Steering Committee and the Orleans Conservation Commission.

The guidelines provide a framework for permitting walkways and stairways that can be implemented through changes in local regulations governing the structures. The guidelines were developed for the Pleasant Bay Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) study area, and it is up to the discretion of each town to apply policies or adopt regulations on a broader basis.

The guidelines provide stringent performance considerations indicating that a walkway or stairway structure should be permitted where it can be demonstrated to provide greater improvement to a damaged resource area than would result from a restoration effort, or where irreparable erosion or destabilization would result without the structure. The guidelines also provide detailed design standards for situations where the performance considerations are met.

“Clearly the message here is that a proliferation of walkways is not desirable from a resource protection standpoint,” Mr. Henson said. “In a case where it can be demonstrated that a walkway or stairway makes sense, then the design standards will help to ensure that it has the least impact possible,” he said.

A Shoreline Structures Work Group convened by the Alliance developed the guidelines. Work group members included representatives from the Orleans, Chatham and Harwich Conservation Commissions, the Chatham Planning and Coastal Resources Departments, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management, WHOI/Sea Grant and Cape Cod Cooperative Extension. The work group met over more than a year to identify issues, review current regulations, and develop standards for application within the Pleasant Bay ACEC. Draft guidelines were submitted for public comment to local conservation commissions, planning boards, state environmental agencies, engineers and attorneys. Comments received during that process have been incorporated in the enclosed guidelines.

The extraordinary system of marshes is perhaps the most unique and significant wetland resource within the Pleasant Bay study area. The Pleasant Bay Resource Management Plan notes the importance of marsh resources to the Pleasant Bay ecosystem and the need to manage human impacts to protect them. Among the human impact issues highlighted in the plan is the development of walkways to provide access over or through marshes and other marine resource areas. The plan recommends that performance standards and design criteria be developed for construction of marsh walkways and related structures to minimize impacts on tidal marshes.

A copy of the guidelines is enclosed.

##

The Pleasant Bay Resource Management Alliance is a cooperative effort among the Towns of Orleans, Chatham and Harwich to preserve the natural resources and public enjoyment of Pleasant Bay.