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Media Release

Pleasant Bay Alliance Releases Fertilizer Management Plan

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The *Pleasant Bay Fertilizer Management Plan* released today by the Pleasant Bay Alliance finds that the existing watershed nitrogen load to Pleasant Bay could be reduced by 5% if steps are taken to manage nitrogen inputs from fertilizers. While that may seem like a modest amount, the reduction could translate into significant savings in infrastructure costs.

“It’s widely acknowledged that on-site septic systems are the number one source of nitrogen from the watershed reaching the Bay, accounting for as much as 75%,” said Carole Ridley, Alliance Coordinator, “but at nearly 16% of controllable load, nitrogen from fertilizers also is a significant source. Local management plans recognize the possibility that controls on fertilizer use could reduce the need for later phases of wastewater infrastructure. We need to be sure that we explore every opportunity to achieve these cost savings, and help up reach our nitrogen reduction targets sooner,” Ridley said.

A report by The Cadmus Group on water quality trends in Pleasant Bay released last October found few statistically significant water quality trends. There was limited improvement in water quality at a small number of open water locations where flushing has been increased due to the inlets, while sites showing declining water quality tend to be located in sub-embayments such as salt ponds where flushing is relatively more restricted.

The trend findings are consistent with MA Estuaries Project analyses, which found significant water quality impairment system-wide, and particularly in salt ponds. The MEP report shows that system-wide, 36.6% of existing controllable load needs to be reduced in order to meet nitrogen targets. In certain sub-embayments, such as Meetinghouse Pond, Ryders Cove or Round Cove, much higher levels of controllable

load must be reduced in order to meet targets. Many of these ponds are surrounded by development that is landscaped and fertilized.

The fertilizer management plan identifies three areas where efforts need to be focused:

1. Working with municipalities to reduce fertilizer use on town fields and parks;
2. Working with golf course managers to establish a targeted reduction in nitrogen from fertilizer use;
3. Targeting public education to year-round and seasonal residents and lawn care professionals to reduce fertilizer applied to residential and business properties.

Beyond the 5% reduction in current watershed load from these measures, the report sees an additional reduction in controllable nitrogen load of 1 to 2% by limiting the size of newly constructed lawns in the watershed.

“Each of these measures will require the involvement and cooperation of interested property owners along with town officials,” Ridley said. “In order to be successful, fertilizer management practices must have the support of those who will be asked to follow them,” Ridley added.

The Alliance also will be reaching out to other organizations that have been active in public education around water resource protection and fertilizer use. As a first step, a public symposium on fertilizer use and alternative landscaping practices is planned for March.

The fertilizer management plan was developed by Horsley Witten Group, Inc. based in Sandwich. Funding for the report came from a grant from the Cape Cod Water Protection Collaborative’s *Shared Watersheds, Shared Responsibilities* grant program.

The entire Pleasant Bay Fertilizer Management Plan is available on the Alliance’s website, www.pleasantbay.org.

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The Pleasant Bay Alliance is an inter-municipal organization of the Towns of Orleans, Chatham, Harwich and Brewster. The Alliance is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the approved resource management plan for the Pleasant Bay Area of Critical Environmental Concern and watershed.