

THESIS ABSTRACT:

As a sandy, glacial deposit with water on four sides, Cape Cod is unstable and susceptible to erosion. The Cape is home to a unique and rich variety of ecosystems which have adapted to the harsh conditions. The sandy base, though presenting problems of erosion and poor soil, also maintains a large groundwater aquifer.

European cultures have historically had fear and antipathy for wild nature. This antagonism meant the only nature which was acceptable and useful was a human-altered landscape. Europeans appreciated nature only to the extent they could extract materials and alter it to their personal use. New World settlers carried their European wilderness views with them and saw the American wilderness as scary and having value only in so far as they could extract commodities from it and alter it to meet their needs and desires. This outlook resulted in widespread deforestation and soil erosion on Cape Cod. Attempts to reduce the damage were only intermittent and based on to the desire to preserve the commodity value of the land.

As America's wilderness disappeared in the nineteenth century, some people started to feel that wilderness did have value for its own sake. There was also a desire to use nature in an efficient rather than reckless way. People started to understand ecological relationships in nature and to understand how human action could damage the environment. Thus, with their desire to conserve nature for itself and for economics, people acted to protect nature using their new knowledge.

In the mid-twentieth century, people were increasingly attracted to Cape Cod's open coastline. People valued nature and wanted to escape urban society. This was mainly a human-centered view.

The uniqueness and importance of the Cape's Outer Beach led to its preservation in the form of the Cape Cod National Seashore in 1961. Cape residents cared for their way of life and for the nature around them and wanted to prevent the growth of tourism from ruining the Outer Beach.

The continuing growth of tourism and of permanent population threatened the Cape's environment. Massive pollution from the Cape's military base showed people the fragility of the aquifer. Awareness of the Cape's susceptibility to pollution in general motivated people to protect their health, the economy, and nature. Voters in 1988 strongly approved referendums which sought to control development to keep it from ruining what was left of Cape Cod's natural environment. Cape citizens then approved in 1990 a new commission to regulate development and protect environment.

People want strong action to preserve the qualities they desire in Cape because many people on the Cape value nature; it's why they live there in the first place. In a fragile place dependant on natural beauty to attract tourists, people see a close connection between humans and their environment. A healthy society and economy on the Cape requires a healthy environment.

These reasons create a different situation from old, antagonistic relationship. Cape Cod may have a potential for an environmental view which can provide for a sustainable and moral relationship between humans and their environment.