

Fresh water is a finite, fragile and valuable resource with profound biological complexity and intrinsic beauty. Water has economic and aesthetic values inherent to its many (and sometimes competing) uses. Clean water should be recognized as an essential good. Similarly, each of our lakes has its own set of unique natural and/or manmade characteristics that impart value and enjoyment to the residents of Sturbridge.

The Sturbridge Conservation Commission (SCC) is appointed by the Board of Selectmen to plan for natural resource protection, acquire important land and water areas, and manage these properties for conservation and recreation purposes. In addition to this responsibility to our municipality, the SCC is charged with enforcing applicable water quality regulations at the local, state and federal levels.

Sturbridge’s Great Ponds

Sturbridge is fortunate to have six Great Ponds designated by the Commonwealth within its boundaries, and all of which are presently in good health: Big Alum Pond, Cedar Pond, Leadmine Pond, Long Pond, South Pond/Quacumquasit Pond, and Walker Pond.

Sturbridge lakes and other wetlands are governed under Federal, State and local laws. The Town of Sturbridge is charged with upholding these regulations, and does so through the joint efforts of the Conservation Commission and Town’s Conservation Department.

Permits from the SCC are required for several types of work within a defined buffer zone and resource areas. This work includes building, repairing, wetland crossing, tree removal, and can affect some landscaping work.

Permitting through the Conservation Commission

Applicants for any permits are welcome to discuss their plans and proposed activity with the Conservation Agent before beginning any formal Permit Application. Activities generally fall into three categories: no permit is required, the activity may be allowable with permit application, or the activity is not allowable. A brief summary is given below, but in cases where project or activity does not easily fit these categories, please consult the Conservation Agent.

Projects/Activities that do not require permitting:

Minor projects that require minimal landscape disturbance such as routine lawn maintenance, general landscaping, or other minor activities do not require permitting from the SCC.

Projects/Activities that may require permitting:

ALL of the following projects may require a permit if work to be performed is within 200 feet of the lake. The process would begin with a Request for Determination Application (RDA). The applicant would submit a completed RDA and come before the SCC to discuss the project and determine what future steps and permitting requirements (if any) are necessary.

- Building additions:
 - exterior remodeling
 - decks or patios (new build or repairs)
 - installing a handicap access ramp
- Retainer wall installation or repair
- Septic system installation or repair
- Stonewall installation or repair
- Vegetation removal:
 - tree pruning at shoreline
 - tree or shrub removal
- Major landscaping projects such as full lawns:

Docks:

Permits are required for the following activities:

- Floats, docks or rafts secured to the bottom of the lake either through piles or other permanent measures.
- Dredging, adding stone or removing bottom soils.
- Any temporary or seasonal floats, rafts, docks or moorings permitted through the Board of Selectmen as Harbor Master under Chapter 91, Section 10A.
- All docks, floats, moorings or rafts which require excavation of any type for installation of footings or other means of securing the structure.

Projects/Activities which are prohibited:

- Sand or beach enhancement. Do not add sand to your beach area; introduced sand is a major source of sediments and phosphorus and is considered a fill operation by state and local regulations.

* **Lake drawdown** is a controlled lowering of the lake’s water level. In Sturbridge, this is done annually on or after November 1st.

Recommended Practices for Land Stewardship

Landscaping and Shoreline Treatment

- Healthy lakes often have messy shorelines with lots of natural vegetation.
- Lake shallows “cleanups” during drawdown* do not promote a healthier lake because they remove valuable nutrients and habitat for small organisms in the lake ecosystem.
- Select Native Plants: Native plants are ideal for landscaping lakeshore homes, and are often more disease resistant and hardier than their exotic counterparts. Contact the New England Wildflower Society in Framingham for information on landscaping with native plants.
- Do not compost grass clippings near the lake. Grass clippings may contain fertilizers, or may release organic nutrients that can promote algae blooms.
- Do not dispose of any organic matter in the lake, or compost near the shoreline.
- Minimize your use of pesticides and herbicides and restrict fertilizer use to outside the buffer zone.
- Limit stump grinding or root ball removal on the shoreline.
- Use pervious walkway and decking designs and materials.
- Trees should be retained along and around the resource area as much as possible. When SCC approves tree or vegetation alteration, they will advise specific guidelines regarding stump grinding, erosion control, and replanting.

Storm Water

When designing or landscaping your lakeside property, paying attention to your water runoff can greatly affect your impact on nearby water resources. Runoff from roofs, driveways, and the roadway can all drain directly into your lake if the lay of your property allows it, and excess nutrients, sediments, bacteria, metals, oils and grease, and pesticides can all flow with it, resulting in non-point source pollution. When possible, you can direct runoff towards wooded or vegetated areas so these materials can be filtered as water flows and disperses. Vegetation can also reduce the velocity of water flow on a problematic slope. The SCC or its Agent can discuss and explain a variety of options.

Mitigation Plans

When a building or other plan has been approved by the SCC, there is often a request for the property owner to take actions to lessen the impact of the disturbances upon the resource area (mitigation). Mitigation actions could include:

planting naturally occurring (native) vegetation, avoiding invasive plant varieties, increasing the vegetative cover to decrease erosion; utilizing pervious (porous or permeable) materials for walkways and pathways, infiltrating stormwater or replanting new trees.

Available Resources

The Conservation Department is available to you as a resource. The Agent has access to online databases at the click of a mouse, and will have an immediate sense of the scope of issues with your specific property and your proposed project. The Agent can visit your site, discuss options, and determine the process for going forward.

In addition, the Sturbridge Lakes Advisory Committee (SLAC) has a considerable resource library (articles, pamphlets, websites, etc.) on good environmental stewardship practices. SLAC can also provide practical advice from long-time shoreline residents on allowed activities and associated permitting concerns and

solutions. We can also suggest proven methods or techniques to reduce the impact or “footprint” of your home on the neighboring lake.

Additional Resources

Massachusetts Environmental Police
Westboro: (508) 366-6537
9:00am - 5:00pm Mon-Fri

Sturbridge Board of Selectmen
(508) 347-2500
8:00am - 4:00pm Mon-Fri
Selectmen@town.sturbridge.ma.us

Sturbridge Lakes Advisory Committee
SturbridgeLakes@gmail.com



Town of Sturbridge
Center Office Building
301 Main Street, Sturbridge, MA 01566

Conservation Department
(508) 347-2506
Conservation@town.sturbridge.ma.us

This guide was sponsored by the
Sturbridge Tourist Association.



protecting these
beautiful lakes



A message for
Sturbridge Shoreline Residents
from your
Conservation Commission
and the
Sturbridge Lakes Advisory Committee