

A Very Special Place

To paddle into Ellisville Marsh on the high tide and see its wildlife up close is to enter a world that has largely escaped the effects of development. It is a peaceful preserve today and a past center for fishing and agriculture. Residents, indigenous people and pilgrims alike, have since pre-colonial times harvested fish, eels, marsh hay and even sea moss here. The marsh has buffered the effects of nor'easters and hurricanes and is likely to play an even more important role as sea levels rise. And it is recognized as a special place, carrying the dual designations of Massachusetts Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and Massachusetts Important Bird Area (IBA). It is one of the few places in the Commonwealth holding both designations. To not have our children and their children be able to appreciate and enjoy such a place is unthinkable. This is why the Friends of Ellisville Marsh exist.

The Dynamic System that is a New England Salt Marsh
Ellisville Marsh is an endlessly changing landscape, always and forever transforming itself. Mother Nature willfully redesigns the barrier beach with every tide cycle, using a palette of sand, cobble and water to create new and intriguing patterns that entice birds, shellfish, juvenile fish and other forms of marine life. Migrating birds make stopovers to feed in the tidal pools and regain body fat lost in flights that cover thousands of miles. Major storms compress weeks of change into hours and bring to bear forces beyond what mere mortals are capable of. People are not totally without influence however. Manmade structures such as the rock groins installed along our beaches in the 1960s alter the natural drift of sediment. The combination of salt marsh and barrier beach, subject to natural and human influences, creates a complex and dynamic system upon which the health of native plants, fish, birds and animals depends. Global rise in sea level threatens to introduce a whole new dimension to this constantly changing environment at the edge of land and sea. Dynamic, highly sensitive, life giving – all of these describe the essence of a New England coastal marsh…especially the 71-acre Ellisville Marsh.

Assessing Ellisville Marsh's Progress Towards Recovery
The Friends of Ellisville Marsh began life as a non-profit organization in 2007 with a simple idea – reopen and maintain the long-blocked marsh inlet to tidal flushing. Tidal flows improve water quality and marsh vegetation, which in turn enhance fisheries and wildlife habitats. A sand spit ten feet high and 50 yards deep stood between Cape Cod Bay and the most direct path for salt water to flow into and out of Ellisville Marsh. The inlet had been maintained by fishermen, and periodically also government agencies, for more than a century until regulatory changes in the 1980s halted the practice. In the thirty years that followed, as many as ten acres of *Spartina alterniflora* (saltmarsh cord grass) disappeared in the back of the marsh, replaced by barren mud flats. Implementing the Friends’ idea was anything but simple, however. After more than two years of intense regulatory work and fund raising, the Friends in late 2010 finally obtained all local, state and federal permits needed to reopen the blocked inlet in its pre-1991, and hydrologically more efficient, location. The Friends’ focus then immediately shifted to assessing the marsh’s health on a number of vectors – wetlands vegetation, shellfish, threatened shorebirds, and water quality to name a few. With nine environmental monitoring programs already underway and having collected baseline data for several years, the Friends are in a position to objectively assess the impacts of limited intervention and careful stewardship on the health of Ellisville Marsh.

Who Are We and What Can You Do?
The Friends aren’t just a grassroots community organization that’s intent upon restoring a sensitive environmental resource so future generations can appreciate it. We feel privileged to collaborate with a broad range of experts to explore the natural and cultural history of our special place. A new species of insect, a cache of old photos, an oral history of the fishery – all these discoveries shed light on the gem that is Ellisville Marsh.

We don’t own the land – we coordinate our stewardship activities with Ellisville Marsh’s joint owners, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (Ellisville Harbor State Park) and the Wildlands Trust (Shifting Lots Preserve). We have no paid staff. We have received no taxpayer funding. We are as conservative with money that you entrust to us as we would be with our own hard-earned money. We understand that scientific methods must be rigorously applied to prove that maintaining the inlet over the long term is justified by the environmental benefits. We welcome those who share our vision of Ellisville Marsh once again becoming a thriving salt marsh that inspires wonder in everyone who walks on its barrier beach or kayaks its narrow channels at high tide. Join with us. Become a member . Volunteer. Add Environmental Steward to your resume. Share the satisfaction of undoing decades of benign neglect and watch how vigorously nature responds when people who care try, and do, make a difference.