



Old Colony Memorial

PRINTER-FRIENDLY FORMAT

## Changing the channel

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By **Emily Wilcox, CNC Newspapers**



This aerial photo was taken in December of 2003, soon after the channel to the right was reopened. It has since closed, restricting tidal waters from exiting and entering the historic Ellisville Marshland, which as a result is deteriorating.

PLYMOUTH - The channel stretched straight into the 55-acre Ellisville Marsh from time immemorial. For hundreds of years, fishermen and residents wielding shovels dug the channel out when storms shifted the sands and blocked it, restricting tidal waters to the marshlands. They knew the channel was important. The tidal flow it allowed kept the marshland flourishing with flora and fauna, and allowed the lobster boats to travel in and out. Fishing weirs hauled in catch after catch, and the channel was maintained, year after year.

Ellisville residents understood that neglecting to dig out the channel would mean the end of their beautiful marshland. There were no studies to support that understanding; the proof was in the dead salt marsh grasses, the absence of fish and wildlife that attended the blockage. Residents knew if they didn't maintain the channel, it would migrate so far south that Ellisville Marsh would no longer drain at low tide.

But time did what it always does - it passed. And when the state imposed strict environmental regulations over Ellisville Marsh in the early 1980s, digging out the channel was no longer the easy option it had been. There were expensive applications to fill out,

environmental reports, phone calls, meetings and a reel of red tape a mile long. State law protected the barrier beach, and one misstep in the approval process could mean legal wrangling. And, in fact, it did.

Last year, the state issued a cease and desist order against a resident for repairing a channel wall.

After spending thousands of dollars to obtain a permit to excavate the channel to save his property from washing out to sea, a required report was not submitted for the repair work. The resident spent thousands more defending himself before the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

Meanwhile, the channel, predictably, closed and migrated south. Ellisville Marsh swelled with the tide, and without the channel, it didn't drain. Marsh grasses drowned, fish no longer slid through the bottleneck of the channel into the marsh, and it started to die.

That's why Ellisville resident Eric Cody and other concerned residents have incorporated the nonprofit organization called Friends of Ellisville Marsh Inc., a group committed to saving historic Ellisville Marsh.

"We're just the latest group, a generation of people who care about their marsh and want to bring it back," Cody said. "This is not self-interest. It's a public matter. Everybody ought to be aware of what we're trying to do."

Ellisville Marsh lies within Ellisville Harbor State Park and the Wildlands Trust's Shifting Lots Preserve. Cody noted that the marsh was vibrant and healthy when lobstermen operated out of the harbor as late as the 1980s, but is deteriorating now.

"The Friends' goal is to use individual and corporate donations, as well as public and private grants, to restore this environmental gem to its former health and ensure its maintenance for future generations," Cody said. "We are looking forward to working with the local, state and federal agencies responsible for protecting the salt marsh and barrier beach. We want to do this the right way."

In short, Friends of Ellisville Marsh Inc. is gearing up for the lengthy permitting process to dig out the channel again to help save the marshland. The group also hopes to gain approval for maintaining the channel in the future, and is looking for members and donations to begin the process.

To become a member, send a check or money order for \$15 to the Friends of Ellisville Marsh Inc., c/o Bob Goldthwaite, 55 Lookout Point Road, Plymouth, MA 02360, along with your e-mail address and phone number. The special designation of "founding member" is available for a \$100 donation.

For more information on the group and its volunteer opportunities, e-mail [info@ellisvillemarsh.org](mailto:info@ellisvillemarsh.org).

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