

# Chapter 11

## Wetlands Protection ByLaw

**Editors Note**– Signs - Deleted October 21, 1985, Art. 15.

**State Law reference** - Wetlands Protection Act, G.L. c. 131, Sec. 40.

**Cross reference** – Chapter 23 of the Stoneham Town Code: Conservation Commission – Stoneham Wetland Regulations.

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A continuous strip no less than twenty-five (25) feet in width, untouched and in its natural state, shall be left undisturbed adjacent to those areas meeting the description of a “wetland” as identified in the Wetlands Protection Act, G.L. Ch 131.§40, and regulations thereunder (310 CMR 10.00) and areas meeting the description of a “wetland” under this Ch. 11, Wetlands Protection bylaw and the regulations thereunder. No person shall remove, fill, dredge, alter or build upon or within this strip.

Establishment of this strip shall be accomplished in the same manner as the buffer zone boundary is established as described in the Wetlands Protection Act, G.L. Ch 131,§40, and regulations thereunder (310 CMR 10.00) and under this Ch. 11, Wetlands Protection bylaw and the regulations thereunder. (5-3-2021, Art. 6)

**Sec. 11.1. Purpose.**

The purpose of this bylaw is to protect the wetlands, water resources, and adjoining land areas in the Town of Stoneham by controlling activities deemed by the Conservation Commission likely to have a significant or cumulative effect upon resource area values, including but not limited to the following: public or private water supply, groundwater, flood control, erosion and sedimentation control, storm damage prevention including coastal storm flowage, water quality, water pollution control, fisheries, shellfisheries, wildlife habitat, rare species habitat including rare plant species, agriculture, aquaculture, and recreation values, deemed important to the community (collectively, the “resource area values protected by this bylaw”). This bylaw is intended to utilize the Home Rule authority of this municipality to protect additional resource areas, for additional values, with additional standards and procedures stricter than those of the Wetlands Protection Act (G.L. Ch. 131 §40) and Regulations hereunder (310 CMR 10.00), subject, however, to the rights and benefits accorded to agricultural uses and structures of all kinds under the laws of the Commonwealth.

**Sec. 11.2. Jurisdiction.**

Except as permitted by the Conservation Commission or as provided in this bylaw, no person shall commence to remove, fill, dredge, build upon, degrade, discharge into, or otherwise alter the following resource areas: any freshwater or coastal wetlands; marshes; wet meadows; bogs; swamps; vernal pools; banks; reservoirs; lakes; ponds of any size; rivers; streams; creeks; beaches; dunes; estuaries; the ocean; lands under water bodies; lands subject to flooding or inundation by groundwater or surface water; lands subject to tidal action, coastal storm flowage, or flooding; and lands abutting any of the aforesaid resource areas as set out in Section 11.8. (collectively the “resource areas protected by this bylaw”). Said resource areas shall be protected whether or not they border surface waters.

**Sec. 11.3. Exemptions and Exceptions.**

The application and permit required by this bylaw shall not be required for work performed for normal maintenance or improvement of land in agricultural use as defined by the Wetlands Protection Act Regulations at 310 CMR 10.04.

The application and permit required by this bylaw shall not be required for maintaining, repairing, or replacing, but not substantially changing or enlarging, an existing and lawfully located structure or facility used in the service of the public to provide electric, gas, water, telephone, telegraph, or other telecommunication services, provided that written notice has been given to the Conservation Commission prior to commencement of work, and provided that the work conforms to any performance standards and design specifications in regulations adopted by the Commission.

The application and permit required by this bylaw shall not be required for emergency projects necessary for the protection of the health and safety of the public, provided that the work is to be performed by or has been ordered to be performed by an agency of the Commonwealth or a political subdivision thereof; provided that advance notice, oral or written, has been given to the Commission prior to commencement of work or within 24 hours after commencement; provided that the Commission or its agent certifies the work as an emergency project; provided that the work is performed only for the time and place certified by the Commission for the limited purposes necessary to abate the emergency; and provided that within 21 days of commencement of an emergency project a permit application shall be filed with the Commission for review as provided by this bylaw. Upon failure to meet these and other requirements of the Commission, the Commission may, after notice and a public hearing, revoke or modify an emergency project approval and order restoration and mitigation measures.

Other than stated in this section, the exceptions provided in the Wetlands Protection Act (G.L. Ch. 131 §40) and Regulations (310 CMR 10.00) shall not apply under this bylaw.

#### **Sec. 11.4. Applications and Fees.**

Written application shall be filed with the Conservation Commission to perform activities affecting resource areas protected by this bylaw. The permit application shall include such information and plans as are deemed necessary by the Commission to describe proposed activities and their effects on the resource areas protected by this bylaw. No activities shall commence without receiving and complying with a permit issued pursuant to this bylaw.

The Commission, in an appropriate case, may accept as the application and plans under this bylaw any application and plans filed under the Wetlands Protection Act (G.L. Ch. 131 §40) and Regulations (310 CMR 10.00).

Any person desiring to know whether or not a proposed activity or an area is subject to this bylaw may in writing request a determination from the Commission. Such a Request for Determination (RFD) shall include information and plans as are deemed necessary by the Commission.

At the time of an application, the applicant shall pay a filing fee specified in Regulations of the Commission. The fee may be in addition to that required by the Wetlands Protection Act and Regulations.

Upon receipt of an application, or at any point during the hearing process, the Commission is authorized to require an applicant to pay a fee for the reasonable costs and expenses borne by the Commission for specific expert engineering and other consultant services deemed necessary by the Commission to come to a final decision on the application. This fee is called the “consultant fee.” The specific consultant services may include, but are not limited to, performing or verifying the accuracy of resource area survey and delineation; analyzing resource

area functions and values, including wildlife habitat evaluations, hydrogeologic and drainage analysis; and researching environmental or land use law.

If a municipal revolving fund has been established, pursuant to G.L. Ch. 44 §53E or a special act, for deposit and Commission use of filing and/or consultant fees described above, then such filing and/or consultant fees shall be deposited therein, for uses set out in the vote establishing the fund. This account shall be kept separate from the account established for filing fees paid under the state Wetlands Protection Act.

The exercise of discretion by the Commission in making determination to require the payment of a consultant fee shall be based upon its reasonable finding that additional information available only through outside consultants is necessary for the making of an objective decision. Any applicant aggrieved by the imposition of, or size of, the consultant fee, or any act related thereto, may appeal according to the provisions of the Massachusetts General Laws.

The Commission may waive the filing fee, consultant fee, and costs and expenses for a permit or other application or RFD filed by a government agency.

The maximum consultant fee charged to reimburse the Commission for reasonable costs and expenses shall be as deemed necessary by the Commission.

### **Sec. 11.5. Notice and Hearings.**

Any person filing a permit or other application or RFD with the Conservation Commission at the same time shall give written notice thereof, by certified mail (return receipt requested) or hand delivered, to all abutters at their mailing addresses shown on the most recent applicable tax list of the assessors, including owners of land directly opposite on any public or private street or way, and abutters to the abutters within 300 feet of the property line of the applicant, including any in another municipality or across a body of water. The notice to abutters shall have enclosed a copy of the application or request, with plans, or shall state where copies may be examined and obtained by abutters. An affidavit of the person providing such notice, with a copy of the notice mailed or delivered, shall be filed with the Commission. When a person requesting a determination is other than the owner, the request, the notice of the hearing and the determination itself shall be sent by the Commission to the owner as well as to the person making the request.

The Commission shall conduct a public hearing on any permit application, Abbreviated Notice of Resource Area Delineation (ANORAD) or RFD, with written notice given at the expense of the applicant, at least five business days prior to the hearing, in a newspaper of general circulation in the municipality.

The Commission shall commence the public hearing within 21 days from receipt of a completed permit application, ANORAD or RFD unless an extension is authorized in writing by the applicant. The Commission shall have authority to continue the hearing to a specific date

announced at the hearing, for reasons stated at the hearing, which may include the need for additional information from the applicant or others deemed necessary by the Commission in its discretion, based on comments and recommendations of the boards and officials listed in Section 11.7.

The Commission shall issue its permit, other order or determination in writing within 21 days of the close of the public hearing thereon unless an extension is authorized in writing by the applicant.

The Commission in an appropriate case may combine its hearing under this bylaw with the hearing conducted under the Wetlands Protection Act (G.L. Ch.131 §40) and Regulations (310 CMR 10.00).

#### **Sec. 11.6. Coordination with Other Boards.**

Any person filing a permit application or RFD with the Conservation Commission shall provide a copy thereof at the same time, by certified mail (return receipt requested) or hand delivery, to the selectboard, planning board, board of appeals, board of health, town engineer, and building inspector. A copy shall be provided in the same manner to the Conservation Commission of the adjoining municipality, if the application or RFD pertains to property within 300 feet of that municipality. An affidavit of the person providing notice, with a copy of the notice mailed or delivered, shall be filed with the Commission. The Commission shall not take final action until the boards and officials have had 14 days from receipt of notice to file written comments and recommendations with the Commission, which the Commission shall take into account but which shall not be binding on the Commission. The applicant shall have the right to receive any comments and recommendations, and to respond to them at a hearing of the Commission, prior to final action.

#### **Sec. 11.7. Permits and Conditions.**

If the Conservation Commission, after a public hearing, determines that the activities which are subject to the permit application or the land and water uses which will result therefrom, are likely to have a significant individual or cumulative effect upon the resource area values protected by this bylaw, the Commission, within 21 days of the close of the hearing, shall issue or deny a permit for the activities requested. If it issues a permit, the Commission shall impose conditions which the Commission deems necessary or desirable to protect those values, and all activities shall be done in accordance with those conditions. The Commission shall take into account the cumulative adverse effects of loss, degradation, isolation, and replication of protected resource areas throughout the community and the watershed, resulting from past activities, permitted and exempt, and foreseeable future activities.

Where no conditions are adequate to protect those resource values, the Commission is empowered to deny a permit for failure to meet the requirements of this bylaw. It may also deny a permit for failure to submit necessary information and plans requested by the Commission; for failure to meet the design specifications, performance standards, and other requirements in regulations of the Commission; or for failure to avoid or prevent unacceptable significant or cumulative effects upon the resource area values protected by this bylaw. Due consideration shall be given to any demonstrated hardship on the applicant by reason of denial, as presented at the public hearing.

Lands within 200 feet of rivers, ponds and lakes, and lands within 100 feet of other resource areas, are presumed important to the protection of these resources because activities undertaken in close proximity to resource areas have a high likelihood of adverse impact upon the wetland or other resource, either immediately, as a consequence of construction, or over time, as a consequence of daily operation or existence of the activities. These adverse impacts from construction and use can include, without limitation, erosion, siltation, loss of groundwater recharge, poor water quality, and loss of wildlife habitat. The Commission may therefore establish performance standards for protection of such lands including without limitation strips of continuous, undisturbed vegetative cover within the 200 foot or 100 foot area, or other form of work limit or setback to buildings, roads, landscaping and other features, unless the applicant convinces the Commission that the area or part of it may be disturbed without harm to the values protected by the bylaw. The specific size and type of protected area may be established by regulations of the Commission.

In the review of areas within 200 feet of rivers, ponds and lakes, no permit issued hereunder shall permit any activities unless the applicant, in addition to meeting the otherwise applicable requirements of this bylaw, has proved by a preponderance of the evidence that (1) there is no practicable alternative to the proposed project with less adverse effects, and that (2) such activities, including proposed mitigation measures, will have no significant adverse impact on the areas or values protected by this bylaw. The Commission shall regard as practicable an alternative which is reasonably available and capable of being done after taking into consideration the proposed property use, overall project purpose (e.g., residential, institutional, commercial, or industrial purpose), logistics, existing technology, costs of the alternatives, and overall project costs.

To prevent wetlands loss, the Commission shall require applicants to avoid wetlands alteration wherever feasible; shall minimize wetlands alteration; and, where alteration is unavoidable, shall require full mitigation. The Commission may authorize or require replication of wetlands as a form of mitigation, but only with adequate security, professional design, and monitoring to assure success, because of the high likelihood of failure of replication.

The Commission may require a wildlife habitat study of the project area, to be paid for by the applicant, whenever it deems appropriate, regardless of the type of resource area or the amount or type of alteration proposed. The decision shall be based upon the Commission's estimation of the importance of the habitat area considering (but not limited to) such factors as

proximity to other areas suitable for wildlife, importance of species in the area. The work shall be performed by an individual who at least meets the qualifications set out in the wildlife habitat section of the Wetlands Protection Act Regulations (310 CMR 10.60).

The Commission shall presume that all areas meeting the definition of “vernal pools” under Section 11.10 of this bylaw, including the adjacent area, perform essential habitat functions. This presumption may be overcome only by the presentation of credible evidence which, in the judgment of the Commission, demonstrates that the basin or depression does not provide essential habitat functions. Any formal evaluation should be performed by an individual meeting the qualifications under the wildlife habitat section of the Wetlands Protection Act Regulations.

A permit shall expire three years from the date of issuance. Notwithstanding the above, the Commission in its discretion may issue a permit expiring five years from the date of issuance for recurring or continuous maintenance work, provided that annual notification of time and location of work is given to the Commission. Any permit may be renewed once for an additional one-year period, provided that a request for a renewal is received in writing by the Commission prior to expiration. Notwithstanding the above, a permit may identify requirements which shall be enforceable for a stated number of years, indefinitely, or until permanent protection is in place, and shall apply to all owners of the land.

For good cause the Commission may revoke any permit, other order, determination or other decision issued under this bylaw after notice to the holder of the permit, the public, abutters, and town boards, pursuant to Section 11.6 and Section 11.7, and a public hearing. Amendments to permits or determinations shall be handled in the manner set out in the Wetlands Protection Act Regulations and policies hereunder.

The Commission in an appropriate case may combine the decision issued under this bylaw with the Order of Conditions, Order of Resource Area Delineation (ORAD), Determination of Applicability or Certificate of Compliance issued under the Wetlands Protection Act and Regulations.

No work proposed in any application shall be undertaken until the permit, ORAD or determination issued by the Commission with respect to such work has been recorded in the registry of deeds or, if the land affected is registered land, in the registry section of the land court for the district wherein the land lies, and until the holder of the permit certifies in writing to the Commission that the document has been recorded. If the applicant fails to perform, the Commission may record the documents itself.

### **Sec. 11.8. Deviations for Hardship.**

The Commission may grant, at its sole discretion, permission for work or disturbance within the twenty-five (25) foot no-disturb strip specified in this bylaw. No deviation from the bylaw shall be allowed except when the Commission finds that denial of proposed work would

be likely to constitute a regulatory taking. For purposes of this bylaw, a regulatory taking is defined as the elimination of all, or almost all, of a property's economic value.

### **Sec. 11.9. Regulations.**

After public notice and public hearing, the Conservation Commission shall promulgate rules and regulations to effectuate the purposes of this bylaw, effective when voted and filed with the town clerk. Failure by the Commission to promulgate such rules and regulations or a legal declaration of their invalidity by a court of law shall not act to suspend or invalidate the effect of this bylaw.

At a minimum these regulations shall define key terms in this bylaw not inconsistent with the bylaw, and procedures governing the amount and filing of fees.

### **Sec. 11.10. Definitions.**

The following definitions shall apply in the interpretation and implementation of this bylaw.

The term "alter" shall include, without limitation, the following activities when undertaken to, upon, within or affecting resource areas protected by this bylaw:

- A. Removal, excavation, or dredging of soil, sand, gravel, or aggregate materials of any kind;
- B. Changing of preexisting drainage characteristics, flushing characteristics, salinity distribution, sedimentation patterns, flow patterns, or flood retention characteristics;
- C. Drainage, or other disturbance of water level or water table;
- D. Dumping, discharging, or filling with any material which may degrade water quality;
- E. Placing of fill, or removal of material, which would alter elevation;
- F. Driving of piles, erection, expansion or repair of buildings, or structures of any kind;
- G. Placing of obstructions or objects in water;
- H. Destruction of plant life including cutting or trimming of trees and shrubs;
- I. Changing temperature, biochemical oxygen demand, or other physical, biological, or chemical characteristics of any waters;
- J. Any activities, changes, or work which may cause or tend to contribute to pollution of any body of water or groundwater;

- K. Incremental activities which have, or may have, a cumulative adverse impact on the resource areas protected by this bylaw.

The term “bank” shall include the land area which normally abuts and confines a water body; the lower boundary being the mean annual low flow level, and the upper boundary being the first observable break in the slope or the mean annual flood level, whichever is higher.

The term “person” shall include any individual, group of individuals, association, partnership, corporation, company, business organization, trust, estate, the Commonwealth or political subdivision thereof to the extent subject to town bylaws, administrative agency, public or quasi-public corporation or body, this municipality, and any other legal entity, its legal representatives, agents, or assigns.

The term “pond” shall follow the definition of 310 CMR 10.04 except that the size threshold of 10,000 square feet shall not apply.

The term “rare species” shall include, without limitation, all vertebrate and invertebrate animal and all plant species listed as endangered, threatened, or of special concern by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, regardless of whether the site in which they occur has been previously identified by the Division.

The term “vernal pool” shall include, in addition to scientific definitions found in the regulations under the Wetlands Protection Act, any confined basin or depression not occurring in existing lawns, gardens, landscaped areas or driveways which, at least in most years, holds water for a minimum of two continuous months during the spring and/or summer, contains at least 200 cubic feet of water at some time during most years, is free of adult predatory fish populations, and provides essential breeding and rearing habitat functions for amphibian, reptile or other vernal pool community species, regardless of whether the site has been certified by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. The boundary of the resource area for vernal pools shall be 100 feet outward from the mean annual high water line defining the depression, but shall not include existing lawns, gardens, landscaped or developed areas.

Except as otherwise provided in this bylaw or in regulations of the Conservation Commission, the definitions of terms and procedures in this bylaw shall be as set forth in the Wetlands Protection Act (G.L. Ch. 131 §40) and Regulations (310 CMR10.00).

#### **Sec. 11.11. Security.**

As part of a permit issued under this bylaw, in addition to any security required by any other municipal or state board, agency, or official, the Conservation Commission may require that the performance and observance of the conditions imposed hereunder (including conditions requiring mitigation work) be secured wholly or in part by one or more of the methods described below:

A. By a proper bond or deposit of money or negotiable securities or other undertaking of financial responsibility sufficient in the opinion of the Commission, to be released in whole or in part upon issuance of a Certificate of Compliance for work performed pursuant to the permit.

B. By accepting a conservation restriction, easement, or other covenant enforceable in a court of law, executed and duly recorded by the owner of record, running with the land to the benefit of this municipality whereby the permit conditions shall be performed and observed before any lot may be conveyed other than by mortgage deed. This method shall be used only with the consent of the applicant.

### **Sec. 11.12. Enforcement.**

No person shall remove, fill, dredge, build upon, degrade, or otherwise alter resource areas protected by this bylaw, or cause, suffer, or allow such activity, or leave in place unauthorized fill, or otherwise fail to restore illegally altered land to its original condition, or fail to comply with a permit or an enforcement order issued pursuant to this bylaw.

The Conservation Commission, its agents, officers, and employees shall have authority to enter upon privately owned land for the purpose of performing their duties under this bylaw and may make or cause to be made such examinations, surveys, or sampling as the Commission deems necessary, subject to the constitutions and laws of the United States and the Commonwealth.

The Commission shall have authority to enforce this bylaw, its regulations, and permits issued hereunder by violation notices, non-criminal citations under G.L. Ch. 40 §21D, and civil and criminal court actions. Any person who violates provisions of this bylaw may be ordered to restore the property to its original condition and take other action deemed necessary to remedy such violations, or may be fined, or both.

Upon request of the Commission, the Select Board and Town Counsel shall take legal action for enforcement under civil law. Upon request of the Commission, the chief of police shall take legal action for enforcement under criminal law.

Municipal boards and officers, including any police officer or other officer having police powers, shall have authority to assist the Commission in enforcement.

Any person who violates any provision of this bylaw, or regulations, permits, or administrative orders issued hereunder, shall be punished by a fine of not more than \$300, after a reasonable time to correct the violation, as determined by the Commission, has passed. Each day or portion thereof during which a violation continues, or unauthorized fill or other alteration remains in place, shall constitute a separate offense, and each provision of the bylaw, regulations, permits, or administrative orders violated shall constitute a separate offense.

As an alternative to criminal prosecution in a specific case, the Commission may issue citations under the non-criminal disposition procedure set forth in G.L. Ch. 40 §21D, which has been adopted by the Town in Section 1-4A of the general bylaws

**Sec. 11.13. Burden of Proof.**

The applicant for a permit shall have the burden of proving by a preponderance of the credible evidence that the work proposed in the permit application will not have unacceptable significant or cumulative effect upon the resource area values protected by this bylaw. Failure to provide adequate evidence to the Conservation Commission supporting this burden shall be sufficient cause for the Commission to deny a permit or grant a permit with conditions.

**Sec. 11.14. Appeals.**

A decision of the Conservation Commission shall be reviewable in the superior court in accordance with G.L. Ch. 249 §4.

**Sec. 11.15. Relation to the Wetlands Protection Act.**

This bylaw is adopted under the Home Rule Amendment of the Massachusetts Constitution and the Home Rule statutes, independent of the Wetlands Protection Act (G.L. Ch. 131 §40) and Regulations (310 CMR 10.00) hereunder.

**Sec. 11.16. Severability.**

The invalidity of any section or provision of this bylaw shall not invalidate any other section or provision thereof, nor shall it invalidate any permit, approval or determination which previously has been issued. (5-3-2004, Art. 7)

**Cross reference** – Chapter 23 of the Stoneham Town Code: Conservation Commission – Stoneham Wetland Regulations.