

# Summary of Stakeholder Feedback on The Trustees' Rescinded Martha's Vineyard Draft Beach Management Plan

## Background and Participants

On June 29, 2022, The Trustees released a Draft Beach Management Plan for the 12 miles of beaches The Trustees owns and manages under contract in Edgartown and Chappaquiddick for stakeholders and the public to review and provide feedback. In response to stakeholder and public interest to be more involved in the planning process, the Trustees rescinded the draft plan and began work on expanding the stakeholder engagement process. The Trustees asked the non-profit Consensus Building Institute (CBI) to support the development and implementation of a stakeholder engagement process to inform future beach management planning efforts which began with conducting interviews and focus groups with a range of stakeholders to get their perspectives on beach management on Martha's Vineyard. This report summarizes stakeholder feedback from those interviews and focus groups as well as written comment letters and responses to an online survey to seek input from stakeholders and beach users on beach operations and user experiences:

- **405 survey responses**, including 294 open-ended comments, to a survey administered by The Trustees which was linked on The Trustees website and shared via social media and email.
- **Individual interviews and focus groups** by CBI with over 20 community members including year-round and part-time residents, local landowners, and local beach users including fishermen and OSV users.
- Written comments and letters from several stakeholders including the Martha's Vineyard Beachgoers Access Group (MVBAG).

## Key Themes and Areas of Feedback

The feedback gathered on the draft plan includes a wide range of perspectives and concerns. While perspectives from stakeholders and beach users vary, several key themes emerged related to beach operations and user experiences. This report is intended to summarize those key themes and areas of feedback – it is not a compilation of every concern or suggestion. Key learnings from specific survey questions are followed by the most common survey responses and corresponding frequencies.

### Beach Uses and Activities

- **People have deep appreciation for the beaches and properties managed by The Trustees.** There is widespread recognition that these landscapes and resources are incredibly unique and should be protected and preserved for generations to come.
- **Most people visit Trustees-managed properties to spend time on the beach.** Spend time on the beach (278), go fishing (70), see wildlife (26), drive around the trails (15). Other activities mentioned include swimming, shellfishing, birding, painting, grilling, foraging, walking dogs, and kiteboarding.
- **People love to visit the beaches with their family.** With family (344), friends (59), alone (15), with their dogs (8).

- **Norton Point Beach and Cape Poge Wildlife Refuge are visited more often than other properties managed by The Trustees.**  
Norton Point (150), Cape Poge (148), Wasque (69), Leland Beach (30), Long Point Wildlife Refuge (7).

### Draft Beach Management Plan

- **Most people we gathered feedback from generally disapprove of the draft plan.**  
Generally disapprove (297), generally approve (59), need more information (48).
- **Top concerns related to the draft plan include:**
  1. **Bayside OSV trail closures** (181)
  2. **Changes to the dog policy** (119)
  3. **No driving in intertidal zones** (49)
  4. **It doesn't go far enough to protect beaches** (27)

### OSV Access and Trails

- **The majority of feedback strongly supported maintaining bayside access via OSV trails.** Top priorities shared by stakeholders include 1) maintaining access for families with children who prefer the calmer bayside beaches and 2) maintaining access to historic shellfish grounds and offshore fishing locations which contribute to the local economy and provide popular recreational opportunities. Some stakeholders fear that closing the bayside trails along Pocha Pond and Cape Poge Bay will divert more OSV traffic to the ocean side trails which are more subject to bird and erosion related closures.
- **For most people, accessing far portions of the beach is the biggest benefit of Oversand Vehicles (OSVs).** Other popular benefits include transporting gear; beach access for older adults and people with mobility challenges; transporting families, children, and dogs; fishing and shellfish access; reaching unwalkable areas; and finding quiet and remote areas.
- **As an alternative to closing OSV trails, many stakeholders shared suggestions for managing OSV impacts to wildlife, dunes, and beaches.** Suggestions include:
  - Widely distribute the new beach driver's guide.
  - Require a training session (in-person or online) to teach people how to drive and use the beach before they receive an OSV permit.
  - Inspect vehicles to ensure required equipment before issuing permits.
  - Increase tire pressure checks at OSV Access points to increase safety instead of banning AWD vehicles.
  - Use stewards to escort visitors around nests.
  - Increase staffing to deter and enforce dangerous speeding and improper driving.
  - Restrict access to 4-wheel drive vehicles only.
- **Some beach users would like to see more OSV restrictions.** Stakeholders cited safety concerns, noise, pollution from gas-powered vehicles, and aesthetic reasons in their suggestions to create more OSV-free areas.

### Changes to the Dog Policy

- **Most people who shared feedback about the dog policy strongly oppose the proposed restrictions and support allowing dogs on the beach.** While a small minority of respondents do not think dogs should be allowed on any beaches at any time, most stakeholders who shared feedback about proposed dog policy changes believe the proposed changes are overly restrictive and think it unfair to punish all dog owners for the bad behavior of a few irresponsible dog owners. Some stakeholders suggested seasonal and beach-specific dog policies only when necessary for environmental and wildlife protection.
- **Many people believe there needs to be stronger and stricter enforcement of current rules to ensure owners keep their dogs on leash.** Suggestions for enforcement include education, increased staffing on the beaches, verbal warnings from rangers, clearly communicated and strictly enforced consequences for repeat offenders including fines and revoking OSV privileges.

### No Driving in Intertidal Zones

- **OSV access from the lighthouse to The Gut along the Cape Poge Elbow is especially important to fishermen and beach visitors.** Several stakeholders expressed strong opposition to eliminating over-sand access to The Gut, especially during fishing season, because doing so will restrict access to historic fishing locations, shellfish grounds, and some of the island's more remote and tranquil beach areas. Some people also shared concerns that restricting OSV access to The Gut would increase the number of boats and boat landings in Cape Poge.
- **OSV access between Norton Point and Wasque is especially important to fishermen.** Stakeholders who opposed eliminating over-sand access between Norton Point and Wasque were most concerned about losing access to surf fishing grounds, additional costs and travel times for trips between Edgartown and Chappaquiddick, and a traffic bottleneck and increased delays at the Chappy Ferry.

### Additional Areas of Feedback

- **Many beach users have noticed an influx of visitors over the past few years which has led to overcrowding on the beaches and increased use of OSV trails and boat landings.** Suggestions to manage and reduce the environmental impacts of increased demand on Trustee-managed properties include reducing the number of OSV passes issued each year, increasing the price of OSV day passes, limiting the number of trips per pass holder per year, limiting the number of daily visitors during peak season while giving priority to island residents, and increasing oversight and management of boaters seeking access to Cape Poge beaches.
- **Stakeholders are interested in learning more about how beach management decisions are made and what data is used to inform those decisions.** We heard from many people that they'd like to know more about the science and data that support changes to beach access and operations.
- **People are eager to be engaged in the Beach Management Plan planning process.** Overwhelmingly, the stakeholders we heard from care deeply about the beaches and properties managed by The Trustees and would like to continue to be engaged in the planning process.