



ALISON SHAW

The land bank has an agricultural preservation restriction on Chilmark's Allen Farm to prohibit development.

over 2,700 acres, more than 4 percent of the Island, for a variety of needs, including recreation and agriculture. But the Island's commitment to conservation goes back further, says James. "Forty or fifty years ago, Islanders saw this coming and put institutions into place by the 1970s, before things got intense."

Bill Veno, senior planner for the Martha's Vineyard Commission, agrees. "There's been a stupendous amount of land conservation since the land bank, and a fair amount before with the Vineyard Conservation Society, Sheriff's Meadow [Foundation], The Trustees [of Reservations]." Indeed, one is hard pressed to name all the conservation groups at work here, including The Nature Conservancy and the Massachusetts Audubon Society, among others.

Chris Kennedy, Islands regional director for the statewide Trustees of Reservations, points to the cooperation between the groups on the Vineyard. "The really nice thing is that we all fill complementary roles," he says. "There are few other places where there's that level of cooperation."

At the center of that cooperation is the Conservation Partnership of Martha's Vineyard. Composed of the land bank, Trustees, Sheriff's Meadow, Nature Conservancy, and Vineyard Conservation Society, the partnership meets monthly to coordinate activities. As the different organizations have slightly different missions, this organization can be critical in conserving properties. Chris notes a recent instance where a landowner approached the Trustees about donating a waterfront property but didn't want to allow public access; as public access is central to the Trustees' mission, Chris helped arrange an agreement with Sheriff's Meadow. Sheriff's Meadow, founded in 1959, has more flexibility in accepting such restrictions – the theory being that preserved land with no access beats a subdivision.

The future of land conservation here on the Vineyard will, in many ways, be at the whim of the real estate market, though James Lengyel expects land conservation on the Island to remain steady "as long as voters continue to enjoy land bank

properties." Both Bill Veno and Chris Kennedy note that there is less suburban-style development occurring, and more larger estates, so while land may get developed, it gets developed less intensively. Wealthy landowners also have the wherewithal to donate properties instead of selling them to developers. And higher property taxes may encourage less-well-to-do landowners to accept conservation restrictions that can lower property values, and thus their tax bill.

In several ways, land conservation represents another area where the environment and traditional notions of prosperity can clash. High-end estates protect land on an island where affordable housing is at a premium; wealthy landowners pay dearly for privacy and public access is severely limited; skyrocketing tax assessments cause Island families to make hard choices.

The softening real estate and building market, while tough for some Island businesses, represents an opportunity, according to Chris Kennedy: "It's a chance for conservation groups to catch our breath, and for the community as a whole to reassess." – J.M.

Education

Most American children spend an average of six hours per day in front of computers, playing video games, watching television, text messaging, and the like, and only four minutes in outdoor play. Children who live on Martha's Vineyard may be on par with the rest of the country, but in general they also have more opportunity to explore the natural world. April Thanhauser, one of the founders of Plum Hill School, a preschool in West Tisbury that aims to be green in both its daily operations and its children's program, says even seemingly simple things like stopping with children at a roadside farm stand "just seeing those carrots with dirt from the earth still clinging to them" can influence their understanding of their environment.

April says, "It's so important to immerse children in nature from an early age, to enable them to make that lifelong connection to the earth." How that connection could help them handle the environmental challenges of the future, she says, is a primary concern in the book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* by Richard Louv (Algonquin Books, 2005), which has inspired the program at Plum Hill School to some degree.

One of the points Richard Louv makes is that even if a child lives next to the woods, it doesn't necessarily translate that he'll be out there exploring. If we're not tuning our children into what is right outside the window, they might not notice on their own. "Every parent and educator should read this book," April says. Some Vineyard teachers already have, at least in one circle where it could really count – the Martha's Vineyard Environmental Education Alliance (MVEEA), an umbrella organization that fosters communication among environmental agencies as well as individuals invested in environmental educa-

tion, like marine researchers, shellfish constables, and teachers.

The director of Friends of Sengekontacket, Christina Miller, is Martha's Vineyard's liaison with the similarly aligned Massachusetts Environmental Education Society (MEES). Christina says while her focus is on Island concerns, it's important to be aware of state environmental education initiatives when the alliance plans its annual program. "Every year we [MVEEA] take a different tack on our program; at the end of the year there's always something concrete that we've accomplished." An example, she notes, is *Quest Martha's Vineyard*. Written and produced primarily by high school students, the treasure map-style guidebook (available at Island bookstores) highlights eight historically or environmentally noteworthy places on the Island.

On the government level, our cultural environmental recession has been exacerbated by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, which has made environmental education in public school systems an unintended casualty. There are efforts in Washington to amend the NCLB this year with a No Child Left Inside Act, which would introduce specific environmental education policies. But Vineyard curriculums have not suffered as much as most because of organizations providing nature-oriented field trips and programs within the school system.

For parents, part of the appeal of raising children on the Vineyard is the potential for connection to nature that

permeates daily life. But it's not just the *exposure* to nature, it's the hands-on experiences – organizations like Felix Neck Wildlife Sanctuary, for example, host nature-oriented programs regularly. Rob Goldfarb, development director at the FARM Institute in Katama, says, "We've had over three thousand visits from Island children and over a thousand have gone through at least one of our programs." Rob stresses that the farm acts as a tool to educate children. "It's not just about milking a goat," he says, "it's about really making a connection to the land, to the environment, to community."

This year, the Island Grown Initiative (IGI), which supports Vineyard farms and food, is working on a Farm to School program to bring Island food into public school cafeterias. Outside the school system, IGI also helps educate children and adults alike by promoting the "farm to table" concept. Rob Goldfarb loves to give this example of how important that concept is: "A recent study at University of Vermont investigated how many times it took a parent to tell a kid to eat their broccoli – eat your broccoli; no! eat your broccoli; no! – before they'd pick up a fork and eat it without being told. Guess how many? *Sixteen*. Then, they did the same study on kids who'd grown and harvested their own broccoli....Guess how many times? *Once*." Like Kentucky writer and farmer Wendell Berry said, and Rob quotes, "It's about putting the culture back in agriculture." – L.B. ♦



Children's programs at the FARM Institute include planting in the garden as well as tending to a variety of animals.

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