

The Martins Pond Assessment and Remediation Project

Diagnostic/Feasibility Study Final Report



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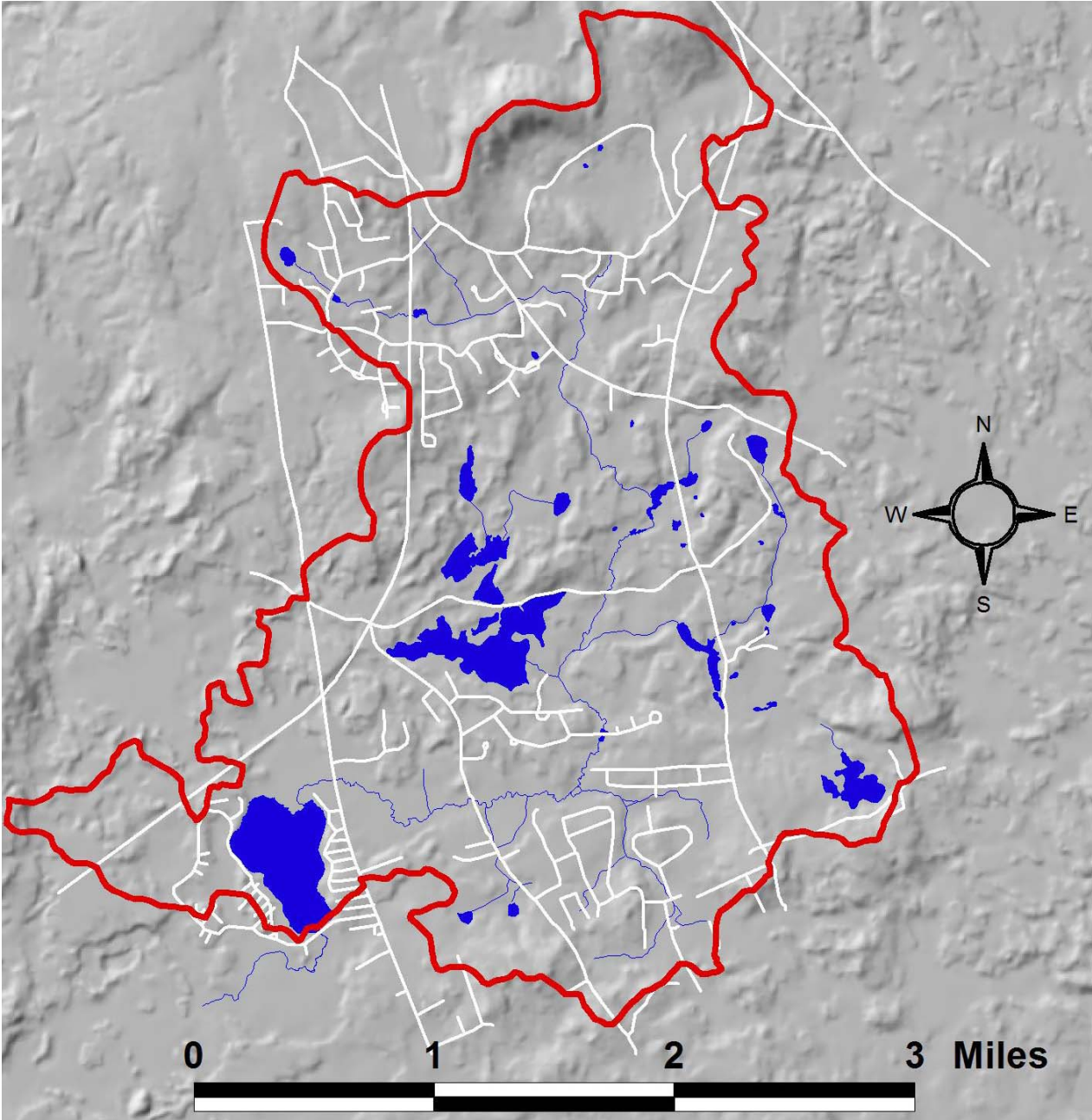
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The Martins Pond Watershed



Shaded Relief Map of the Martins Pond Watershed.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Martins Pond (segment MA92038-2004) is a Great Pond in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and covers some 92 acres. It is a Class B water body meaning that it is designated for supporting aquatic life and recreational uses. Martins Pond is listed under the Massachusetts Year 2004 Integrated List of Waters (303d list) as an impaired water body due to **turbidity, noxious aquatic plants, exotic species and metals**. Turbidity levels are such that the Pond does not meet minimum clarity for swimming, and a local beach that offered swimming at one time, has been closed since 1988. Being on the 303d list, Martins Pond is classified as a *Category 5 Water*, which means it requires a TMDL. The Martins Pond watershed is located within the 155 mi² Ipswich River watershed (MA01102000). The northern portion of the watershed is in Essex County and the southern portion in Middlesex County. The total watershed area is 4927 acres

In late 2004, the General Court of the Commonwealth directed the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) through Chapter 352 of the Acts and Resolves of 2004, Section 78, to expend funds toward the assessment and remediation of Martins Pond. The Town of North Reading agreed to use the funds received from DEP specifically for the purpose of water quality problem identification and mitigation. The Town was given the charge of continuing water quality assessment work conducted on Martins Pond towards the goal of completing a new Diagnostic/Feasibility Study for Martins Pond and an assessment of potential non-point source pollution in the Martins Pond Watershed.

The water quality of Martins Pond and the Skug River, have been the focus of study since at least the 1970s. Federal, State and Town agencies, private groups and concerned citizens have all been involved in assessing water quality, proposing remediation measures, and in some instances, implementing management practices. The large number of studies on Martins Pond conducted to date, reflect the hydraulic, hydrologic and nutrient dynamic complexity in the pond and its watershed. One main goal of this report was to synthesize the information from previous reports and integrate it with the work conducted in the most recent time frame (2005-2006) and draw some broad conclusions about the nature of this watershed. A summary of the major findings and recommendations of this report are given below.

Turbidity and Light Attenuation

Light is arguably the most important limiting factor regulating macrophyte and algae growth in Martins Pond. One of the most critical aspects of the current study is the impact of the relatively high water color levels in Martins Pond (and in the Skug River, its tributaries and several other ponds in the watershed) on light attenuation through the water column. Color alone, at median levels found in Martin Pond, can reduce available light by 1/3rd at depths of only 0.4 m. Light attenuation is further exacerbated by the relatively high turbidity levels observed in the pond. Combined, these factors are effectively limiting macrophyte growth, the extent of the littoral zone and the spatial and temporal scale of algal blooms. In addition, low water clarity is creating conditions unfavorable for swimming.

historical center of all the previous and most recent diagnostic work conducted in and around Martins Pond, these other parameters provide critical context for evaluating current conditions and in formulating management options to improve water quality.

Martins Pond can be considered highly eutrophic and it exhibits very high levels of phosphorus. The mean yearly total P concentrations (0.040 mg/L in 2003, 0.069 mg/L in 2004 and 0.052 mg/L in 2005-06) clearly put Martins Pond in the eutrophic category. NPSLAKE modeling predicts Martins Pond should have a concentration of 0.029 mg/L/. Given that only 12.5% of all lakes and ponds in the North Eastern Coastal Zone ecoregion are classified as eutrophic based on total P and other Trophic Status Classification Index (TSI) criteria, Martins Pond should be considered among the most eutrophic surface waters in the ecoregion. In addition, the loading of P entering (and leaving) Martins Pond has essentially doubled over the past two decades. This is reflected in both the overall watershed loadings (327 kg/year in 1985 and 657 kg/yr in 2005-06) as well as the increase in mean concentration of total P. Watershed sources of P are clearly the most important inputs representing 89.7% of the total P inputs, while septic system inflows represent some 7.4% of P inputs.

Watershed inflow accounts for only 58.3% of the total N budget for Martins Pond. The source of the other N inputs remains unknown, but it is likely a combination of septic tank inflows, atmospheric deposition, shoreline property run-off (including fertilizers), stormwater conveyance, wetland inputs, nitrogen fixation in the water and sediments, decomposition occurring at lake and pond bottom sediments and inputs from groundwater.

Given the eutrophic conditions, nutrient dynamics are complex in Martin Pond, especially in relation to nitrogen versus phosphorus limitation. The results of this study suggest that the pond may be nitrogen limited in some seasons, phosphorus limited in others, and perhaps some combination of the two at certain times of year. During most of the winter and spring, the N:P ratios were all well over 30:1 (in some cases an order of magnitude higher) indicating the potential for P limitation in Martins Pond. However, during the summer and early fall sampling dates (June through September), the N:P ratios were less than 16:1, indicating the potential for N limitation. Thus, based on the N:P ratios observed in the current study, it appears that Martins Pond may be shifting from P limiting conditions to N limiting conditions over the course of the year. The observed seasonal patterns of total P and total N concentrations also reflect complex seasonal dynamic of P and N sources and sinks. Similar seasonal patterns in N:P ratios have been observed in other shallow, eutrophic systems and complicate efforts to manage nutrient dynamics in Martins Pond.

Any efforts to control and reduce nutrient inputs need to have a strong watershed-based component. Martins Pond is thus challenged with a classic non-point source pollution problem. An integrated suite of BMPs will need to be implemented watershed-wide to reduce the watershed influx of nutrients into Martins Pond. Examples of BMPs to achieve nutrient reductions include fertilizer controls, landscaping management, controlling pet wastes, septic system maintenance and stormwater conveyance alterations. Implementation of BMPs should begin with the subwatersheds exhibiting the highest loadings of nutrients. The Towns of North Reading, Andover and North Andover will have to coordinate their efforts to maximize efficiency and effectiveness.

Swimming Potential

Martins Pond is a Class B water meaning that it is designated as a habitat for aquatic life, and wildlife, and for primary and secondary contact recreation. One long-term management objective since the Town Beach was closed in 1988 was to have the Pond once again meet the water quality standards to allow swimming. Given the high turbidity and color in Martins Pond, achieving water quality standards for swimming will need to balance the goal of improving turbidity to the point where swimming is allowed, but not to the point where light is no longer limiting in the pond. Improvements in water clarity will be positively correlated with macrophyte growth, littoral zone extension and algal productivity. These conditions could result in eutrophication processes becoming even more accelerated than current levels.

It is also recommended that there be continued monitoring of fecal coliform bacteria levels to document effectiveness of bacteria source reduction activities including treatment of stormwater discharges, any sewerage activities around Martins Pond and the Phase II community stormwater management programs. Subwatersheds A and D in the current study has been problematic since the 1970s in terms of fecal coliform bacteria levels and below-standard water quality. They should be the focus of any initial remediation efforts. Other subwatersheds that require attention are F, E and I. In addition, in Martins Pond, fecal coliform levels and *E. coli* have been shown to exceed water quality standards during storm events and this issue will need to be addressed in any bacterial reduction management planning.

In order to be able to resume swimming in Martin Pond in the short-term, one option that the Town of North Reading should consider implementing is the use of a barrier curtain during the summer swimming season could achieve the clarity requirements of Massachusetts Department of Public Health. The barrier could be temporarily installed each season. This would allow contact recreation in the pond and be a solution to the complex and inherent problem of high natural turbidity and water clarity issues in this stained pond and allow for treatment of bacteria within the confines of the barrier curtain. Such a barrier could result in producing Secchi depths greater than the 4 ft minimum standard. This represents a relatively low cost and immediate solution to the lack of contact recreation in the pond.

Septic Conversion to Sewering

Since the diagnostic work in the 1970s, there has been evidence that septic systems are a likely contributor to both fecal coliform levels and nutrient loading (particularly N and to a lesser extent P) into Martins Pond, other surface waters and into the Skug River and its tributaries. Converting wastewater disposal from septic systems to sewerage should be part of a long-term management plan to reduce bacterial contamination and help reverse the trend of increasing eutrophication in Martins Pond by reducing N and P inflows.

While not the only solution to the eutrophication problems of Martins Pond, sewerage is an essential step on the road to ensuring the long-term recreational use potential of the pond and

part of a broader watershed plan to begin reductions in sources of nutrient loadings to the pond. Sewering will not dramatically decrease P inputs because the main sources are watershed loadings (89.7%), but sewerage would decrease P inflows. More significantly, sewerage could reduce N inputs into the pond; internal N loadings represent 41.7% of the total N budget of Martins Pond. Thus, sewerage should be one part of a multi-pronged program to decrease N and P inflows. In addition, bacterial contamination, particularly during storm events, needs to be addressed if contact recreation and swimming are going to be long-term use options for Martins Pond. Thus, it is highly recommended that the Town of North Reading and all Martins Pond stakeholders set a timeline for the development of a feasible and effective sewerage program.

Watershed-Based Management Planning

The Martins Pond watershed is clearly a complex system that is influenced by a host of natural forces and numerous anthropogenic influences both currently as well as in the near and more distant past. The watershed has experienced a legacy of repeatedly altered land use and altered hydrology, including extensive human land use alteration, conversion and manipulation as well as beaver dam construction. As such, it is not surprising that the water quality dynamics of surface and groundwater, and the hydrology of Martins Pond and its watershed are complex. Surface water quality improvements in Martins Pond thus should be viewed from a watershed perspective. Solutions for continued water quality improvement and restoration of ecological integrity of Martins Pond are needed and an integrated program of watershed management and in-pond restoration procedures will need to be pursued.

Watershed-based management planning will be essential and the most complex management goal to achieve. Water quality in Martins Pond is heavily influenced by watershed-based non-point source pollution as evidenced by high watershed loadings of TSS (91.2%), P (89.7%) and N (58.3%). Therefore, effective management plans need effectively address the source of impairment and a comprehensive watershed approach will be needed to begin to address existing water quality issues in Martins Pond.

One aspect of a comprehensive watershed-based management plan is the development and implementation of a concerted shoreline restoration effort along the shores of Martins Pond. In particular, there are opportunities to reduce sedimentation and runoff by re-directing runoff into BMPs and/or infiltration areas at several locations around Martins Pond. This could then be expanded to other properties in the watershed adjacent to ponds, rivers and/or streams. In addition, a focus on maintenance and remediation of stormwater outfalls immediately adjacent to Martins Pond and along all river and stream channels in the entire watershed is recommended. We recommend implementing a 100 ft buffer rule, whereby all outfalls within 100 ft of surface waters be retrofitted with basic swales and/or detention basins to limit impact of stormwater on surface water resources in the watershed (see Section 10). In addition, a stream bank survey of the Skug River and its tributaries is recommended to identify other potential sources of water quality impairment and ecological degradation such as soil erosion, stream bank degradation and residential intrusions.

Nuisance Macrophyte Species Control (Fanwort)

Fanwort (*Cabomba caroliniana*) is the major nuisance macrophyte species of concern in Martins Pond. Mechanical harvesting was used in 2005 to control fanwort and harvesting remains an option in the future, but should be used very judiciously. Following mechanical harvesting in 2005, there was a dramatic decrease in both the extent and abundance of fanwort in Martins Pond relative to the pre-harvest conditions. The percent occurrence of fanwort on all sample points in 2006, the year after mechanical harvesting, was only 6.5%, compared to 38.9% in 2005, suggesting that harvesting was successful in reducing the overall level of occurrence of fanwort in Martins Pond.

However, the abundance of fanwort in the non-harvested area also showed dramatic decreases despite not being harvested. This suggests that fanwort abundance may have been in a decline cycle despite the harvesting effort. Variability in species abundance of both fanwort and other species was clearly evident over the past 40 years, regardless of any harvesting or mechanical management activities.

The 2006 macrophyte post-harvest survey results showed decreases in all three measures of diversity. It is hard to decipher the relative contribution of harvesting to these declines, but clearly harvesting did not have any positive impact on the abundance and distribution of aquatic plant diversity in Martins Pond. The reduction in species richness is particularly of interest and needs to be monitored closely if any additional harvesting activities are proposed. Fanwort control must be balanced with full consideration of the ecological integrity of the native aquatic plant communities in Martins Pond.

Thus, no additional harvesting should occur without conducting a pre-harvesting survey to determine if fanwort abundance and distribution warrant control efforts. A crucial consideration in any future management effort should be to maintain the aquatic plant diversity in Martins Pond, especially in a system with a high proportion of uncommon species, complex and in many cases non-overlapping spatial distributions of species and a system with inherently high levels of temporal variability in species diversity and abundance. Limited mechanical harvesting for maintenance of boat channels and/or high use recreational is a viable management option, but only on a very limited basis and preceded by a quantitative survey of both the composition and spatial extent of existing macrophyte species. Post-harvesting impacts must also be monitored before any new harvesting is considered.

Purple Loosestrife Control

Biological control of purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) along Martins Brook has been marginally successful to date. *Galerucella* release sites 2 and 3 have shown some signs of success but not any widespread or sustained impact. One key factor likely limiting the success of the biocontrol project is that the surface water level at the release sites has exceeded the critical threshold in 2003, 2005 and 2006. This is likely correlated to the extreme reduction in

reduced beetle herbivory noted in this study. The concerns surrounding surface water elevations in the Martins Brook wetland complex south of Martins Pond and influenced by flow restrictions further downstream. Given these important constraints, any future beetle releases should be in more elevated portions of the Martins Brook release site. There is micro-topographical variation in the wetlands and release sites should be shifted to areas of higher elevation to help avoid the negative impacts of high seasonal water levels. Given that it is typical that it often takes 4-7 years out to begin to see results in biological control projects, additional raising and releasing of beetles is recommended at all 3 release sites. Beetle herbivory still has potential at the release sites if high water levels can be worked around. Thus it is recommended that beetles be released again in 2007 and that the monitoring and release program continue at least through 2010.

Project Partner Acknowledgments

The core partners on this project were the Town of North Reading, the Martins Pond Association, Malcolm Pirnie Inc. and the Department of Biology at Merrimack College. However, several additional local and State agencies, organizations and concerned citizens have made important contributions to this project. The content of this study thus represents the efforts, work and contributions of numerous people and groups. The following list highlights some of the individual project contributors and their contributions to the project.

- Kim Honetschlager, GIS Coordinator in North Reading, provided valuable and detailed GIS data from North Reading for the project.
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- Mary Trudeau, North Reading Conservation Commission Agent, was instrumental in reviewing and guiding the implementation of the fanwort harvesting and ground water well monitoring portions of the project.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Part I. Diagnostic Study	
Section 1.0 – The Martins Pond Watershed	4
Section 2.0 – Previous Work within the Watershed and Current Issues	6
Section 2.1 Trophic Status of Martins Pond	14
Section 2.2 Land Use	16
Section 2.3 Land Use and Hydrological Change in Harold Parker State Forest.....	18
Section 2.4 Surface Waters	22
Section 2.5 Groundwater Levels	23
Section 2.6 Key Conservation and Protected Lands	24
Section 2.7 Topography and Subwatershed Delineation	26
Section 2.8 Slope Classes	28
Section 2.9 Bedrock Geology	29
Section 2.10 Surficial Geology	31
Section 2.11 Soils	32
Section 2.12 Groundwater Divide	34
Section 2.13 Wetlands	36
Section 3.0 –Martins Pond	38
Section 3.1 Pond Sediments	42
Section 2.2 Biological Conditions: Algae and Fish	44
Section 4.0 – Surface Water Quality Assessment	46
Section 4.1 Quality Assurance Performance Plan (QAPP)	50
Section 4.2 Overview of Water Quality Assessment Objectives	51
Section 5.0 - Surface Water Chemistry in Subwatersheds	53
Section 5.1 Components of Turbidity in Martins Pond	54
Section 5.2 Total Suspended Solids	57
Section 5.3 Color	60
Section 5.4 Light Attenuation Profiles	63
Section 5.5 pH	66
Section 5.6 Conductivity	68
Section 5.7 Chloride	70
Section 5.8 Sulfate	72
Section 5.9 Dissolved Oxygen	75
Section 5.10 Total Phosphorus	77
Section 5.11 Historic Trends in Total Phosphorus Levels in Martins Pond	81
Section 5.12 Nitrogen Levels	83
Section 5.13 Nitrate Levels	85
Section 5.14 Total Nitrogen	88
Section 5.15 Nitrogen: Phosphorus Ratios	90
Section 5.16 Nutrient Limitation Bioassays	93
Section 5.17 Water Quality Summary	97

Section 6 – Hydrology and Nutrient Budgeting	99
Section 6.1 SWMM 5.0.009	100
Section 6.2 SWMM Modeling Parameters	102
Section 6.3 Model Calibration	106
Section 6.4 Model Validation	108
Section 7 – Phosphorus Modeling and Budget	113
Section 7.1 Phosphorus Loading into Martins Pond	114
Section 7.2 Phosphorus Loading in the Martins Pond Watershed.....	118
Section 8 – Nitrogen Modeling and Budget	119
Section 9 – Nutrient Dynamics Summary	122
Section 10 – Sediment Loading into Martins Pond.....	126
Section 11 – Fecal Coliform / <i>E. coli</i> Levels and Bacterial Source Tracking	127
Section 11.1 Fecal coliform and <i>E. coli</i> Results	127
Section 11.2 Septic Systems	131
Section 11.3 Storm Event Bacterial Levels in Martins Pond	135
Section 11.4 Bacterial Source Tracking	136
Section 12 – Stormwater Conveyance	138
Section 13 – Macrophyte Analysis and Fanwort Control	141
Section 13.1 Macrophyte Sampling and Analysis Methods	143
Section 13.2 Pre-Harvesting Fanwort Distribution and Abundance	145
Section 13.3 Fanwort Control via Mechanical Harvesting	147
Section 13.4 Post-Harvesting Macrophyte Survey Results	150
Section 13.5 Macrophyte Species Assemblages and Communities	157
Section 13.6 Pilot Alum and Herbicide Application Studies	160
Section 14 – Biological Control of Purple Loosestrife	161
Section 14.1 Loosestrife Biocontrol Results	163
Section 14.2 Influence of Surface Water Elevation at Release Sites	166

Part II. Feasibility Study

Section 15 – Pond and Watershed Management Alternatives	169
Section 15.1 Doing Nothing	171
Section 15.2 Physical Management Options to Control Nuisance Macrophytes	172
Section 15.3 Chemical Control of Algae and Macrophytes	178
Section 15.4 Chemical Sediment Treatments	180
Section 15.5 Septic Conversion to Sewering	181
Section 15.6 Watershed Management	182
Section 15.7 Restoring Swimming Potential	184
Section 15.8 Biological Control of Purple Loosestrife	185
Section 16 – References	186

Appendices

<i>Appendix A – Scope of Services</i>	194
<i>Appendix B – Draft TMDL for Total Phosphorus for Martins Pond</i>	197
<i>Appendix C – Water Quality Data and Results</i>	199
<i>Appendix D – Surface Water Quality Standards for Class B Waters</i>	213
<i>Appendix E - Harvesting Summary Report from ACT</i>	215
<i>Appendix F – List of Recommendations from 2003 Lakes and Ponds Report</i>	217
<i>Appendix G – Fanwort Brochure from Massachusetts DCR</i>	

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Chronology of Investigations, Reports and Key Activities in and around Martins Pond and it's Watershed.	8
Table 2	A general comparison of lake and pond characteristics used to classify surface waters.	12
Table 3	A Trophic Status Classification based on water quality variables (after Carlson 1977 and ENSR 2000).	14
Table 4	Current land use summary within the Martins Pond watershed.	18
Table 5	A comparison of land use change in the Martins Pond Watershed from 1971 to 1999.	19
Table 6	A comparison of pond characteristics within the Martins Pond watershed.	22
Table 7	Correspondence of subwatershed delineations in the current versus delineations in previous watershed studies.	27
Table 8	A summary of Soil Series found in the Martins Pond Watershed.	32
Table 9	A summary of the cover of wetland types in the Martins Pond Watershed.	37
Table 10	Basic limnological characteristics of Martins Pond.	38
Table 11	Relationship between surface elevation of Martins Pond and extent of surface area.	39
Table 12	A summary of flooding elevation information for Martins Pond.	41
Table 13	A summary of fish survey results conducted in Martins Pond.	44
Table 14	A summary of diatom, blue-green algae and green algae identified in Martins Pond.	45
Table 15	A summary of the surface water quality monitoring/sampling sites used in the current study.	47
Table 16	A summary of parameters and methods used in the current study.	50
Table 17	A comparison of relative percent land use cover on the ten study subwatersheds.	52
Table 18	A comparison of the mean organic content of TSS samples across all sample sites during the 2005-06 study.	59
Table 19	A summary of laboratory light attenuation results comparing the relative contributions of TSS, algae and organic acids (color) to light level reductions in the top 0.4 m of the water column.	65

Table 20	Conductivity levels over time at each sample site in the Martins Pond watershed.	69
Table 21	A comparison of percent oxygen saturation at the sample sites during the 2005-06 study.	76
Table 22	A summary of N deposition during the 2005-2006 study period.	84
Table 23	A seasonal comparison of nitrate levels at the 13 sample sites during the 2005-06 study.	86
Table 24	A comparison of Total N values across sample sites and dates.	89
Table 25	A summary of N:P molar ratio results for all sample sites over the 2005-06 study period.	91
Table 26	Experimental Design of Nutrient Bioassay Experiments.	93
Table 27	A summary of median water quality parameter comparisons between regional summary studies and Martins and Field Ponds.	98
Table 28	A summary of information for the 29 catchments used in SWMM for this project.	101
Table 29	A summary of flow monitoring results conducted over the study period.	111
Table 30	A comparison of phosphorus loading into and out of Martins Pond.	115
Table 31	A comparison of P loading estimates from the 1985 and 2006 Diagnostic/Feasibility Studies for Martins Pond.	116
Table 32	A phosphorus budget component summary for Martins Pond.	117
Table 33	A monthly comparison of phosphorus loading in different subwatersheds, at the two wetland sites in the study, and at the Martins Pond inlet and outlet in the Martins Pond Watershed.	118
Table 34	A monthly comparison of total nitrogen loading in different subwatersheds in the Martins Pond Watershed.	119
Table 35	A comparison of nitrogen loading into and out of Martins Pond.	120
Table 36	A total nitrogen budget for Martins Pond.	121
Table 37	TSS loading into Martins Pond and flux of TSS out of Martins Pond during the 2005-06 sample period.	126
Table 38	A comparison of fecal coliform levels during non-storm events in Martins Pond and its watershed.	128
Table 39	<i>E coli</i> results for the 2005-06 sample season.	129

Table 40	Results of septic system age study conducted by subwatershed.	133
Table 41	A summary of the 43 stormwater outfalls found within 100 ft of surface waters.	140
Table 42	A comparison of the density and occurrence of macrophytes from previous quantitative studies on Martins Pond.	152
Table 43	A comparison of macrophyte species richness and diversity in Martins Pond from 2002 to 2006.	155
Table 44	Comparison of species richness, species diversity and individual species mean abundance on non-harvested versus harvested plots based on 2006 sampling – one year following harvesting operations.	156
Table 45	A Summary of Potential Physical Management Options for Martins Pond	172

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	A map showing both the location and area of the Martins Pond watershed relative to the Ipswich River Watershed and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.	4
Figure 2	Land use in the Martins Pond Watershed based on the 21-category land use classification system (LU-21 codes) in MassGIS (based on 1999 aerial photography).	17
Figure 3	Groundwater elevations at Andover, MA over the past 30 years.	23
Figure 4	A summary of open space and conservation lands within the Martins Pond watershed.	25
Figure 5	Extent of the major 10 subwatersheds used in the current study relative to topography.	26
Figure 6	Soil slope classes in the Martins Pond watershed.	28
Figure 7	Bedrock geology that underlies the Martins Pond Watershed.	30
Figure 8	Surficial geology in the Martins Pond Watershed.	31
Figure 9	Hydrologic soil group (HSG) classification for soils within the Martins Pond Watershed.	33
Figure 10	The proposed groundwater divide reproduced from the IEP (1977) eutrophication study.	35
Figure 11	Distribution of wetland types that are found in the Martins Pond watershed.	36
Figure 12	Water depth or bathymetric map of Martins Pond created in 2005.	40
Figure 13	The spatial extent of organic sediments in Martins Pond.	43
Figure 14	Martins Pond watershed map showing the locations of surface water quality monitoring/sampling sites relative to the 10 major subwatersheds delineated and assessed in this study.	46
Figure 15	Elevation of primary monitoring/sampling sites used in surface water analysis for this study.	48
Figure 16	The mean levels of inorganic TSS and organic TSS in Martins Pond from 2004 to 2006.	54
Figure 17	The mean levels of chlorophyll-a in Martins Pond from April 2004 to March 2006.	55
Figure 18	A comparison of NTU versus the sum of turbidity components (inorganic TSS + organic TSS + chlorophyll-a) in Martins Pond from April 2004 to March 2006.	56
Figure 19	Boxplot of mean Total Suspended Solids (TSS) levels across sites during the March 2005-March 2006 sampling period.	57

Figure 20	A comparison of total TSS levels (g/L) over the March 2005 to March 2006 Martins Pond watershed study.	58
Figure 21	A comparison of color (Pt-Co Units) in surface waters in the Martins Pond Watershed during the 2005-06 sampling period.	61
Figure 22	Mean Fe and Mn concentrations in surface waters at sampling points within Martins Pond watershed from March 2005 to March 2006.	62
Figure 23	A summary of the light attenuation results for the laboratory experiment conducted using the 25 th , 50 th and 75 th percentile levels for each of the three parameters used in this study: TSS, algae (chlorophyll-a) and tannic acid (color).	64
Figure 24	pH levels over time at each sample site in the Martins Pond watershed.	67
Figure 25	A site comparison over time of the concentration of chloride in surface waters in the Martins Pond watershed from March 2005 to March 2006.	71
Figure 26	A comparison of sulfate levels (SO ₄) in the Martins Pond watershed during the 2005-2006 study period.	72
Figure 27	Mean sulfate levels found in surface waters in Martins Pond versus wet deposition values reported from the NADP/NTN Monitoring Location in Lexington, MA.	73
Figure 28	The frequency distribution of total P levels in summarized for 1,155 lakes, ponds and reservoirs in New England. This Figure is taken from the ENSR (2000) <i>Collection and Evaluation of Ambient Nutrient Data for Lakes, Ponds and Reservoirs in New England, Data Synthesis Report</i> .	77
Figure 29	A comparison of total P values from 2003 to 2005 at five Skug River sample sites (WW1 to WW6) and the Martins Pond inlet (MP1) and outlet (MP3).	79
Figure 30	A comparison of surface water P values for additional sampling sites in 2005-06 in the Martins Pond watershed.	80
Figure 31	A comparison of mean total P values (mg/L) reported in Martins Pond over time from 1972 to 2006.	82
Figure 32	A comparison of chlorophyll-a concentration change over the 8-day nutrient bioassay period.	96
Figure 33	A summary of the 29 catchments used for the SWMM modeling.	100
Figure 34	Hyetograph used in the hydrological modeling over the 2005-2006 study period.	104
Figure 35	Plot of observed versus simulated flow at the Route 28 – Skug River crossing.	107
Figure 36	A comparison of gauge height over time at three gauged sites: Skug River at Route 28 and the Martins Pond outlet at Burroughs Road.	108

Figure 37	A stage-discharge plot of ln stream flow (cfs) versus ln gauge height for the Skug River at Route 28 in North Reading.	109
Figure 38	A comparison of the monthly difference in nutrient flux at the Martins Pond outlet versus the inlet.	123
Figure 39	A - A summary of septic system ages in the northern portion of the Martins Pond watershed.	131
Figure 39	B - A summary of septic system ages in the southern portion of the Martins Pond watershed.	132
Figure 40	Map showing the 100 m buffer zone around Martins Pond.	134
Figure 41	A comparison of fecal coliform levels for three different sampling periods at specific locations around Martins Pond.	136
Figure 42	Locations of all stormwater outfalls in the Martins Pond watershed.	139
Figure 43	Location of aquatic plant sample points (purple dots) for the July 2006 post-harvest survey.	144
Figure 44	A comparison of fanwort distribution and abundance in Martins Pond in 2002 and 2005.	145
Figure 45	The harvesting map created for Aquatic Control Technology Inc., to guide their mechanical harvesting work in July 2005.	148
Figure 46	The abundance and distribution of fanwort (<i>Cabomba caroliniana</i>) based on the 2006 survey results.	153
Figure 47	The distribution of fanwort with depth in Martins Pond in 2002, 2004, 2005 (pre-harvest) and 2006 (post-harvest).	154
Figure 48	A comparison of NMS ordination results.	159
Figure 49	Aerial photograph (orthophotograph) of southern Martins Pond and Martins Brook outlet running south and southwest showing the three approved beetle release sites used for the release of <i>Galerucella</i> beetles.	162
Figure 50	A comparison of herbivory on loosestrife at the three release sites from 2002 to 2006.	163
Figure 51	A comparison of purple loosestrife mean biomass at the three release sites between 2002 and 2005.	164
Figure 52	Surface water elevations at the beetle release sites from April 2003 to May 2006.	166
Figure 53	Positive and negative feedback patterns impacting algal and macrophyte growth in shallow, eutrophic lake systems (after Scheffer et al. 1993).	170

Introduction

The Martins Pond Assessment and Remediation Project

Martins Pond (segment MA92038-2004) is a Great Pond in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and covers some 92 acres. It is a Class B water body meaning that it is designated for supporting aquatic life and recreational uses. Martins Pond is listed under the Massachusetts Year 2004 Integrated List of Waters (303d list) as an impaired water body due to **turbidity, noxious aquatic plants, exotic species and metals**. Turbidity levels are such that the Pond does not meet minimum clarity for swimming, and a local beach that offered swimming at one time, has been closed since 1988. Being on the 303d list, Martins Pond is classified as a *Category 5 Water*, which means it requires a TMDL.

In late 2004, the General Court of the Commonwealth directed the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) through Chapter 352 of the Acts and Resolves of 2004, Section 78, to expend \$300,000 toward the assessment and remediation of Martins Pond. The Town of North Reading agreed to use the funds received from DEP specifically for the purpose of water quality problem identification and mitigation. The Town was given the charge of continuing water quality assessment work conducted on Martins Pond towards the goal of completing a new Diagnostic/Feasibility Study for Martins Pond and an assessment of potential non-point source pollution in the Martins Pond Watershed.

The primary work outlined in the *Scope of Services* (Appendix A) has been completed. This report describes the over year-long study results of the project and represents the Final Diagnostic/Feasibility Study Report for the project. The recommendations in this study offer suggestions as to how the Town of North Reading, the Martins Pond Association and other stakeholders might build on the work presented in this study and improve the water quality, the ecological integrity and the recreation potential of Martins Pond and the entire Martins Pond watershed. Throughout the report, many section headings are followed by an italicized, parenthetical *Scope of Services* code. This code refers to the specific work called for under the approved Scope of Services (Appendix A).

PART I. DIAGNOSTIC STUDY

Section 1.0 The Martins Pond Watershed

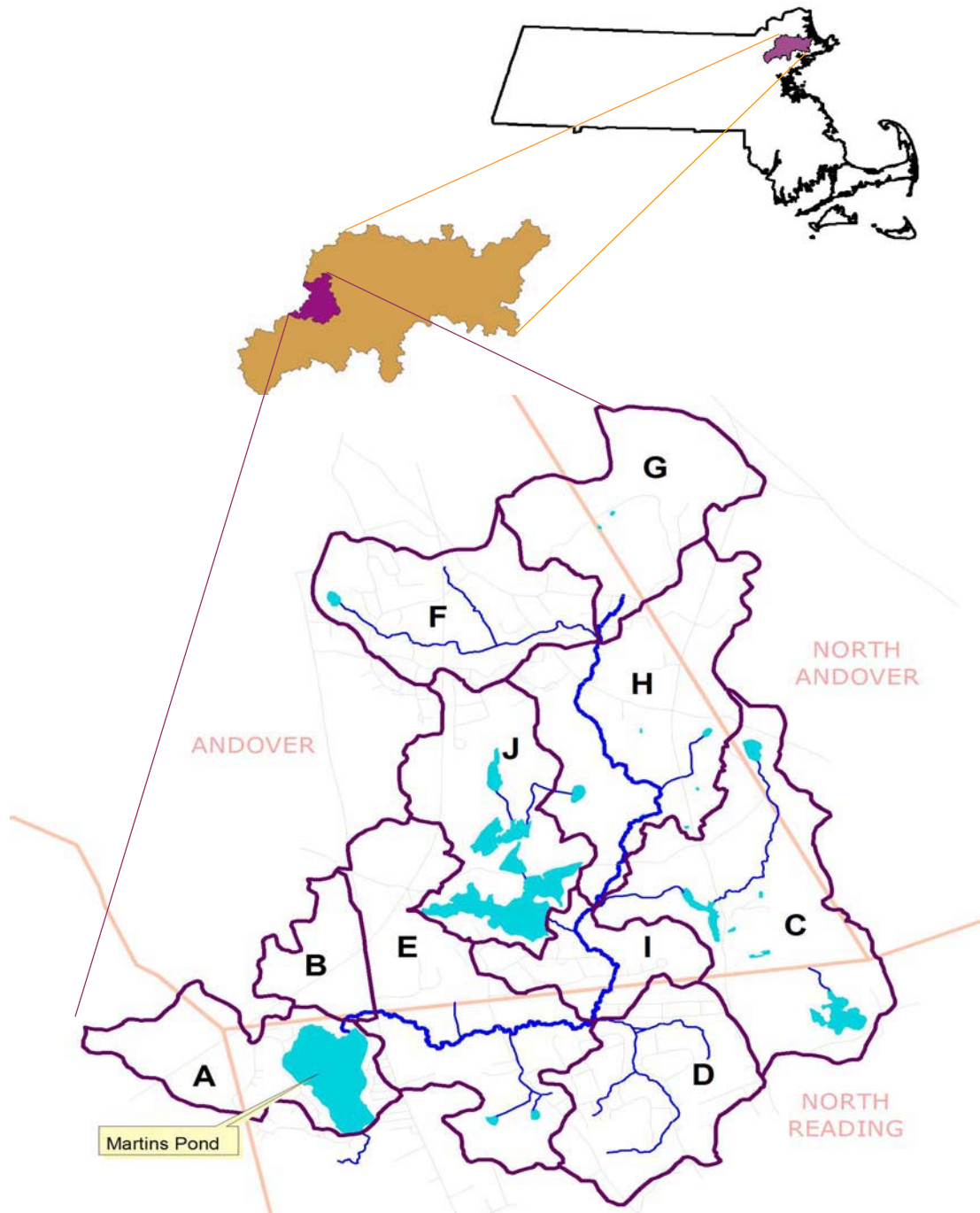


Figure 1. A map showing both the location and area of the Martins Pond watershed relative to the Ipswich River Watershed and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Major subwatershed boundaries are also shown (labeled as A through J). The watershed (4927 acres) includes lands in both Essex and Middlesex Counties and is located in EPA Region I.

Figure 1 shows the geographical location and size of Martins Pond and the Martins Pond watershed. Both are located within the 155 mi² Ipswich River watershed (MA01102000). The northern portion of the watershed is in Essex County and the southern portion in Middlesex County. The total watershed area calculated for this study, 4927 acres (1994 ha), is slightly higher than previous calculations of 4673 acres (IEP 1977) and slightly less than the 5057 acres presented by Anderson-Nichols and Lycott (1985). However, given the GIS technology available to calculate land areas, it is not surprising that there has been some variance in the determination of area in different decades. More importantly, these differences have no real impact on the interpretation of the study results in the current report. Thus, the 4927 acre figure will be used throughout this report and all watershed-based calculations are based on this value.

The revision of watershed boundaries in the present study reflect more detailed mapping and coincide with the data provided by MassGIS (www.mass.gov/mgis/) and the USGS National Hydrology Dataset (NHD) (nhd.usgs.gov/). The watershed and subwatershed boundaries shown in Figure 1 were revised in 2005 as part of the current study. The watershed includes part of four Towns as noted below:

Town	Acres	% of Total Watershed
Andover	2865.5	58.2 %
North Andover	577.0	11.7 %
North Reading	1336.5	27.1 %
Wilmington	148.0	3.0 %
<i>Totals</i>	<i>4927</i>	<i>100 %</i>