

Opinion

EDITORIAL

Our Personal Water Supply

If there are trillions upon trillions of gallons of icy, fresh clean water hundreds of feet beneath Nantucket's sandy, gravelly surface and if in fact it leaks out at low tide along Monomoy Shores, bubbles up onto a Wauwinet Road lawn at Eat Fire Springs and into the reeds of Folger's Marsh, why then do we talk of watering bans and record pumping days during the busiest summer months?

For the same reason there are two harbor watersheds – one each for Nantucket and Madaket harbors – and a wellhead protection district. Clean drinking water will probably never be in the come-to-Nantucket rhetoric in off-island advertising. Only on monthly water quality reports does Nantucket's water supply shine like Nantucket's brighter jewels of open space conservation, beaches and the wealth of endangered plant and animal species.

But our water, our sole source aquifer, is just that, our only source and literally the lubricant for all activities topside on Nantucket. Being at sea 30 miles out brings splendid isolation, peace and solitude from the ills of the mainland, but we pay for that with varying degrees of self-sufficiency, one of which is reliance on one source of water: what falls from the sky and what is already in the ground.

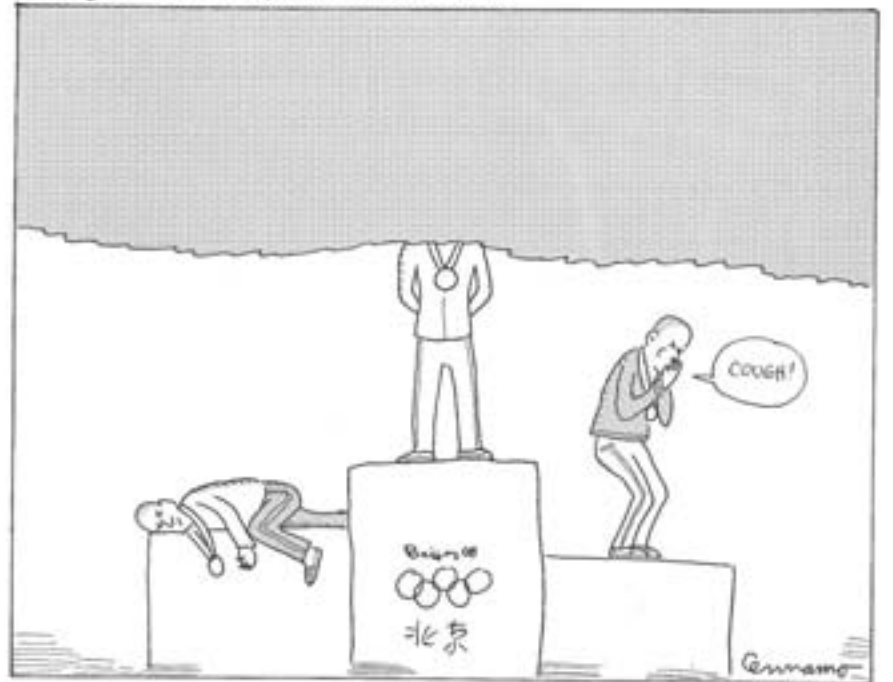
Though it is voluminous, clean and its lower layers are believed to be 20,000 years old – older than the last glacier to grind over the island – unlike the sandy shores, the wilderness and the critters that cohabitate with us on the island, all of which if we had to, we could deal without, we cannot function without water. And right now, we can barely

pump and store enough of it in our two town storage tanks. Yet, as stewards of this precious resource, we seem to place a mainland culture of green lawns and botanical opulence at a higher value than the essentials of island survival.

With saltwater intrusion always an enemy of potable, healthy water and not a contaminant that we islanders can completely divert from the aquifer, there are water polluters that can be controlled such as the amount of fertilizer used on properties all over the island – not just in the two watersheds – through the Nantucket Landscaping Association's Best Management Practices. There are also common sense, non-glamorous preventive and conservation actions that can be taken, including maintaining septic systems or replacing them at the first signs of malfunction, bicycling, walking or riding the bus for your island conveyance to reduce the potential oil and fuel drippings and spills and limiting water usage with low-volume toilets and low-flow shower heads. Planting drought-resistant flowers, shrubs and decorative grasses, and watering lawns and gardens sparingly by hand can wean water abusers from too much use as well.

These conservation measures may all sound nitpicky, given what we know of the size of the massive lake below us, but because the town's wells, 'Sconset's wells and all the private wells on the island are drawing just at the very top of the aquifer where the highest concentration of toxicity resides, it behooves all of us to tune our collective conscience to a reverence for water as if each drop we drank or bathed in came from our own personal supply. ■

Grey Matter by James Cennamo



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor,

As I pulled up to the pump last weekend and emptied my wallet for \$4.35 a-gallon gas, I thought what a shame it is that we aren't doing more to lessen our dependence on imported oil.

For almost 40 years we have been talking - but not doing - anything significant to solve the problem. Alternate energy is clearly one answer. What about projects like Cape Wind in Nantucket Sound? Shouldn't we allow it to be built to help us become energy independent? On reflection, the answer is a resounding "no."

Expensive offshore wind plants will result in little or no oil self-sufficiency. That's because wind energy produces electricity primarily as a substitute for natural gas, the main power source for electricity in New England and other regions of the country. Oil-fueled power plants play a minor role in generating current for our homes and businesses, usually as supplements and back-ups.

This is a key point of T. Boone Pickens' plan; demand for oil is driven by our transportation needs, not electric power generation. In fact, oil is responsible for but two to three percent of our national power generation. At the same time, transportation demands roughly 75 to 80 percent of oil consumption. Reduction in demand for foreign oil will happen when we abandon fuel-thirsty vehicles in favor of fuel-efficient ones, powered by natural gas, bio-fuels, hybrid sources and electricity, a trend already underway.

Even if you accept Cape Wind's claim that it would reduce use of up to 113 million gallons if the project were to totally displace oil-fired generation (which it would not), that figure represents less than four-one-hundredths of one percent of the nation's annual oil consumption. Cape Wind will not have a significant effect on reducing demand for oil plants because those plants generally are turned on during times of greatest

power demand when air conditioners are running full tilt. Thus the project would reduce oil demand in a miniscule way but at an extremely high cost to the environment, the local economy, and to public safety.

As we saw during recent heat spells, there was little wind, but the New England grid managers were able to satisfy high demand using existing generators. During the June heat wave, Cape Wind's own website showed it would have produced at less than 15 percent of its capacity, had it been operating on Horseshoe Shoal.

As for meeting our future electricity needs, New England is making great progress on the renewable energy front. The Massachusetts Division of Energy Resources is forecasting this year's Renewable Portfolio Standard - which calls for an annually increasing percentage of electricity to come from renewable sources - will be met. In other words, we will have a sufficient supply of green energy to meet demand.

For more than 30 years, we have known the risks of being too dependent on foreign oil. It is a problem that neither Democrats nor Republicans solved when they were in charge of the national agenda. Any bi-partisan, responsible national energy policy has to include widespread conservation, a hike in vehicle fuel economy standards with alternative fuel supply, and development of renewable energy and other alternative power sources in proper locations.

Massachusetts' new energy law has appropriate incentives to encourage conservation and small-scale renewable generation. It is a good model for other states to follow. But let's not deceive ourselves into thinking that by sacrificing Nantucket Sound, gas prices will come down. That's folly, just like the Cape Wind project itself.

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The Alliance to
Protect Nantucket Sound

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