

Before You Fill That Wetland

On a Department of Environmental Protection website, there are the following statements: “Most wetlands are found on private property-maybe even yours,” and “Landowners have an important role in protecting wetlands.”

Unfortunately some of these landowners have the idea that they can do whatever they want on their property. There are those who believe that if they want to build a tool shed, make a garden, or put in an extra parking space on the back of their property where those cattails are growing, they have a right.

Well, not exactly.

There are numerous restrictions on what the landowner can and cannot do with his property. The most important of these regulations are those that protect our wetlands. The Mendon landscape is crisscrossed with a network of wetlands. They include those that border the Mill River, Meadow Brook, Spring Brook, Round Meadow Brook, Muddy Brook, Willow Brook, Rock Meadow Brook, Hop Brook, Wigwam Brook, and Ohio Brook, along with numerous feeder streams. In size they can range from the vast wooded swamps of Long Meadow to the long fingers and small patches that occur anyplace where the groundwater intercepts the surface. Contrary to the old prevailing sentiment that wetlands are wastelands and “The only good wetland is a filled-in, dredged, or channelized one,” these wetlands perform valuable and crucial functions. They act as giant sponges and a single acre of wetlands has the capacity to retain over one million gallons during a heavy rain. They recharge our water supplies by slowly releasing that water and they also filter out pollutants. And they provide a rich habitat for our wildlife. Most rare and endangered species depend on wetlands for their survival.

So if you are thinking about doing anything that will alter a wetland, it is imperative that you first check with the Mendon Conservation Commission. Although they will try to work with you, it is their sworn duty to protect the wetlands of the Commonwealth. And, make no mistake about it; they will do exactly that. Just ask those transgressors who have been forced to remove fill, replant vegetation, and restore a wetland. They will tell you that it can be a very expensive and a very time consuming process.

The Conservation Commission office is located in the lower Town Hall and the hours are Tuesdays & Thursdays from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. So before you fill that wetland, give them a call at (508) 634-6898 or via e-mail at concom@mendonma.net.