

**Land-Use History of
Long Point Wildlife Refuge**
By Lloyd Raleigh, The Trustees of Reservations

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Quansoo, Tississa, Pasquanahommon's Neck, and other necks on the south shore in Takemmy are described in several original deeds as "plain," "meadow," "field," "cornfields", and "woodlands,"⁶ and Brereton in 1602 described necks of land and their open character: "It containeth many pieces or necks of land...On the outside of this Island are many plaine places of grasse...in the thickest part of these woods, you may see a furlong or more round about"⁷

Footnotes:

No. 6: A deed on August 2, 1669 (1/33) describes the original purchase of Tississa and the necks to its west: "all meadow upon the neckes of land on the south side of the island in his bounds." Another deed from June 27, 1668 (Land Records Vol. A, p. 86) describes the area around Tisbury Great Pond as "ye plain and ye meadow, cornfields, woodlands." These records are prior to any settlers in Takemmy. Another deed from January 4, 1699 describes a "field" on Pasquanahommon's Neck (Land Records Vol. B, p. 598), which was also called Mosoowonkwonk, meaning a "mowing meadow," Banks II, p. 25).

No. 7: Brereton, 1966:6 in: Peters, 1977. This is likely, but not confirmed as the south shore of Martha's Vineyard.

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Cornfields and settlements covered this landscape. Testament to this is Scrubby Neck's native name—Wachepemepquah—meaning planting field or cornfield and accounts of other early explorers and settlers of southern coastal New England.⁸ Tississa's other name, Kuppiauk, means heavily wooded land, showing the diversity of habitats around Ukquieset or Tisbury Great Pond.⁹ The necks of Long Point were therefore likely a mixture of agricultural fields, open meadow, and woodland.

If we can believe the accounts of early settlers, the native people frequently used fire. Several settlers note large areas of woodland regularly burned, with mention of hunting grounds kept open and "fresh and sweet" with fire.¹⁴ Thomas Morton in 1632 wrote that "the Salvages are accustomed to set fire of the country in all places where they come; and to burn it twice a yeare."¹⁵

Grey's Raid - 50 percent of the sheep found on the island in 1775. Banks

Footnote:

No. 14: Russell (1980) includes accounts by Verrazano in 1524 noting the "multitude of fires that met his eyes," p. 13. Connecticut native people kept the hills open using fire, p. 125.

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The combination of firewood gathering and fire created landscapes described by settlers as "open and parklike," or "the trees, though tall, were generally not very thick and that there was no underwood save in the swamps, where the native's fires did not penetrate," or trees "growinge a greatt space assonder...as

our parks in England,” or, as another example, “in the thickest part you may see a furlong or more about.”¹⁷

Footnote:

No. 15:....A 1634 quote by William Wood, quoted by Byers (1946:19) in W.A. Patterson and K. E. Sassaman (1988) also supports the timing of burning in the fall: “for it being the custome of the Indians to burne the wood in November, when the grasse is withered, and leaves are dried, it consumes all the underwood, and rubbish, which otherwise would overgrow the Country, making it impassable, and spoil their much affected hunting so that by this means in those places where the Indians inhabit, there is scarce a brush or bramble, or any cumbersom underwood to bee seene in the more champion ground.”

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For whaling, hunting seal, traveling, as well as fishing, the Wampanoag used boats constructed from a single log and large enough for ten to twelve people.

Footnote:

No. 36: When moving to another site, they would simply bring their mats with them. The Wampanoags moved several times a year, usually living at one site during the warmer months and another more sheltered site during the winters. Judging by the middens Ritchie found, they would return to the same place year after year, generation after generation. Cogswell, 1841, pp. 48-9, in Ritchie, p. 6.

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Between 1669, the first sale of Seconquit and 1691, when the last native population “quit claim” of the necks of Long Point, the native population slowly lost control of Seconquit, through sales and town control.⁴⁵ In addition, the native population appeared to have left Pasquanahommon’s Neck as late as 1705.⁴⁶ A small tribe, however, persisted on the south side of Deep Bottom cove, although in 1849 only four families remained.⁴⁷

Footnote:

No. 38: Cheever, 1848, pp. 35, 69, 71, 73, in Ritchie, Whitney, p. 102-103. Whitney notes shifting agriculture on Cape Cod and in Rhode Island, where fire was used to bring the fields back into cultivation.

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By 1671, “the proprietors of Tisbury were now in possession of all the present bounds of West Tisbury except the Christian town and the meadows or necks eastward of Tississa to the bounds of Edgartown and to the South of the Mill Path.”⁵² This same year, the first division of land occurred in the plain surrounding the mill River, where the soils were fertile.

In 1681, Josias the sachem sold to Simon Athearn the neck of land between Deep Bottom Cove and Long Cove—Seconquit.⁵⁶ In 1683, Josias sold the same land at Seconquit to the town of Tisbury.⁵⁷

Footnote:

No. 49: Takemmy was called Tisbury and includes the land now divided into Tisbury and West Tisbury.

No. 56: 1/307. At the time, Long Cove Pond was connected to Tisbury Great Pond by a creek and was considered one of its coves.

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...the Navigation Acts, which disallowed any trade with Europe and bankrupted many merchants.

Land at Long Point, once purchased from the Wampanoags,⁶³ was turned into commons and subsequently divided. Each neck of land, which included Seconquit or Charles' Neck, Pasquanahomon's Neck or Mussoowonkwonk, and Scrubby Neck, was divided into sixteen shares, commonly held.⁶⁴ Apparently the Wampanoags were still living, using, and claiming the necks, even though, their sachem had sold them. Finally on February 2, 1692, several Wampanoags "quit claim of Seconquit and ye necks," and the town appointed John Manter and Peter Robinson as attorneys to defend the "meadow gras and hay on Seconquit, Peanaskenamset and Mossoonkhonk" from Indian use (improvement).⁶⁵ This date marks one of the last days the native populations influenced the Long Point landscape, and the last Indian home was recorded in 1705 at Pasquanahommon's Neck.⁶⁶ Now that the necks were under town control, grazing rights and shares were given to town proprietors and sold on the open market.⁶⁷ In 1707, Charles' Neck was divided in half....

Footnotes:

No. 65 – Peter Robinson was sold "all ye meadows or mowable land" in the Mussoowonkwonk area as sold to him by Josias (5/373).

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Simon Athearn also exerted influence in this area, and Alexander, a son and heir of Josias the sachem, gave him the right to improvement of any sort of land in Takemmy according "to the accustomed Right and power of the Sachim...with the improvement of all sorts of wood and timber and benefits of the water and beach and drifts of the seas cast thereon."⁷⁰

Simon Athearn's estate shows his broad holdings of land. His mansion was at the Great Neck west of Tississa, and he owned woodland between "Pine Hill" and the home of Jabez Athearn near today's Priestler's Pond. He also owned common lands, "the sixteenth part of [Tisbury common lands]," land in Tississa and Charles' Neck, and land on the plain of the Old Mill River. In Chilmark, he owned salt meadow, and in Edgartown he owned some land as well. The value of this land and buildings was 1,234 pounds, likely around 1,000 acres of land. In addition, his survivors were given a total of 750 pounds. Considering that half of Scrubby Neck, complete with structures, was sold for 150 pounds, this sum of indicative of a very wealthy man.⁷² On his land, grazed 302 sheep, twelve cows, two pair of oxen, six steers, two heifers, a bull, eight yearlings, six swine, and one mare.⁷³ Some of his interesting possessions included two harrows, one plow, pitchforks, hoes, a cart, a grindstone, 60 pounds of sheep's wool, two looms, three spinning wheels, a pair of wool cards, and more luxurious items such as looking glasses, a pewter platter, napkins, two large Bibles, and brass candlesticks.⁷⁴

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On February 14, 1716, Experience Luce sold to (Solomon Athearn) him an additional eight shares at Scrubby Neck, including buildings, fences, and wood.⁷⁸ At this point, Solomon owned all of Scrubby Neck and Pasquanahomon's Neck.

Finally, between 1719 and 1733, Solomon Athearn purchased much of the land at Seconquit. His brother Samuel sold him approximately 300 acres of land, swamp, and meadowland at Seconquit. Inholdings at Seconquit included lands owned by James Allen and John Manter.⁷⁹

He, his wife, and his one son and five daughters then led a life of farming on this open land of meadows. To this date, the only mention of woodland in all the deeds from the Long Point area is at Scrubby neck.⁸¹ By this time, however, any woodlands could have been cleared, despite a small population in the area.

In 1699, Mill Path, which connected New Town (West Tisbury) with Edgartown, in order to bring milled products to the harbor at Edgartown, was constructed. By 1707 a cart path and a middle way were described at Seconquit.⁸²

The middle way was a boundary line for the division of lands in 1707 as was a ditch.⁸⁴

Many of the deeds at this time also mention fences. Therefore, in 1733 we see a working farm complete with roads, fences, and buildings, owned by Solomon Athearn and covering almost three necks, likely over 1,000 acres, with only a couple of small inholdings.

Footnote:

No. 84. Property boundaries were often laid out as ditches. A plow would create a ditch on either side of the property boundary, leaving the soil mounded on the property line. Peters, E.L. 1977. *Land Tenure and Subsistence on Martha's Vineyard: An Introduction to a Study of the Pond People.*

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The population of Martha's Vineyard during this time expanded from about 1,000 residents to over 3,000 by 1802, with over half the population living in Tisbury.⁸⁹

Processing of wool and corn were also important, hence, fulling, carding, and grist mills turned their moving parts with a power of the Mill Brook and Tiasquin River.⁹⁰ The first mill was established in 1669.

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Footnote:

No. 92: William Butler describes collecting bark in his diary of 1792. He also described building fences, harrowing corn, cutting and carting wood, removing hide hair with lime, plowing, planting corn and potatoes, carting manure, driving cattle, and washing and yarding sheep. Butler, W. Martha's Vineyard in 1792—A Diary. *Dukes County Intelligencer*, 8(2) and 8(4).

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Still most people at this time were employed as farmers, especially in Tisbury and Chilmark, and 20,000 sheep grazed the island in 1775.⁹⁴ By the end of the century, growth of a farming economy had slowed, as much of the forests on the island were cleared, and signs of reaching a carrying capacity of the land were noted.⁹⁵

Between September 10 and 15 1778, 4,333 troops under Sir Charles Grey raided Martha's Vineyard, taking 2,752 sheep and 97 cattle in Tisbury and 10,574 sheep and 315 cattle on Martha's Vineyard.⁹⁹

Footnote:

No. 95: Although Tisbury managed to be self-sufficient in wood, Edgartown had to import most of its firewood. Freeman, p. 14. Also, a letter from 1762 noted that "the Island has now as many inhabitants as the Land will comfortably support; so that if there should be any further increase of Inhabitants it seems they must be supported by Whaling, Fishing, and seafaring business... In Peters, p. 30 as quoted in Banks, I, p. 278.

No. 99: Banks, I, p. 367-383. This amounts to 50 percent of the sheep found on the island in 1775.

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On July 27, 1761, Simon Athearn purchased tracts near Deep Bottom Cove and Long Cove Pond, north of George Manter's land at Middle Point, and an area called "Long Point" from his father Solomon. This is the first mention of Long Point as a place name;...

The farmland at Long Point was richly developed at this time. A woodlot, enclosed by a fence to keep out livestock, provided firewood for the farm.¹⁰⁸ A newly built homesite at Scrubby Neck contained a well, cherry trees, and rows of apple trees in an orchard, through which a cart path meandered. Most of the land was open; cattle, goats, and sheep grazed in the pastures and likely in forested areas as well.¹⁰⁹ These grazed areas as well as cultivated areas were likely burned to encourage the growth of grasses or to release nutrients into the soil.¹¹⁰ Growing corn by rotating land under cultivation was the common practice of the day and at best, Thomas could only cultivate 10 to 20 acres of cropland, leaving large areas in fallow or pasture.¹¹¹ Thomas Walrond Jr. also maintained a woodlot at the Woody Bottom, the bottom north of Tyres Cove. Swampland covered the head of Long Cove Pond, which was still connected to Tisbury Great Pond through a creek, into which the famous Manter cannonball fell. Another homesite existed near Deep Bottom and Watcha Path and included a corn house and a barn.¹¹²

Footnote:

No. 108 – "...the fence that encloses the woods on the East side of the middle point Pond..." (Probate, 9/111). This is the first mention of a woodlot at this location. Today, older trees still exist at this location and future references indicate that these woods were a working woodlot from at least 1799 to the time of the Tisbury Pond Club.

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In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the south shore necks of Tisbury were still remote, self-sufficient farms, yet tax increases, the rise and fall of the whaling trade, industrialization, technological innovations, transportation advances, and the westward movement of the frontier were powerful factors that changed the very fabric of life at Long Point. By 1903, these factors led to a shift from farmland to hunting grounds, as wealthy seasonal residents created hunting clubs along the south shore.

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Agriculture, nevertheless, also became more industrialized as steel plows were mass manufactured by John Deere and Leonard Andrus beginning in 1837. By the 1870s, refrigerator railroad cars were

developed, facilitating transportation of perishable goods, and by the turn of the century, agriculture was undergoing a large-scale shift towards more fertilizer use and increased mechanization and commercialization.¹¹⁸

By the middle of the nineteenth century, there were 329 whaling ships in New Bedford alone. This employed thousands of people, from whalers to provisioners and factory workers. Whales were used primarily for their oil for use in lubrication, leather tanning, and lighting but also for their baleen, filtering teeth made of keratin, which were used for carriage springs, fishing rods, women's hats, and parasol ribs.¹¹⁹

Whales had declined in number, making each voyage longer and harder in order to bring home a profit.¹²¹ Petroleum performed many of the same functions as whale oil and began to replace it. Thomas Edison's invention of the electric lamp in 1879 and the development of steel products used to replace baleen by the first decade of the twentieth century also led to the demise of whaling.¹²²

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In 1892, the Town of West Tisbury was incorporated, with a lower tax rate appropriate for a farming community.

During the whaling boom, Tisbury became a source of both supplies and whalers. The mills of Tisbury provided flour, baked and sold as bread to whalers. Dr. Fisher, a wealthy resident of Edgartown, realized the potential of this market and purchased 600 acres of land in Tisbury and built or purchased five dams along the Mill Brook. He also contracted with farmers to grow wheat and built a road that connected his mills to Edgartown.¹²⁷ Unfortunately, wheat did not grow well in the relatively poor soils of Martha's Vineyard and was not very profitable; the industry closed after his death in 1876.¹²⁸ Sixteen years earlier, the population of Tisbury peaked with 1,803 people and a productive farming community. Five thousand five hundred and sixty-eight sheep grazed its meadows and 553 tons of English Hay were produced. For Martha's Vineyard, 60 percent of cranberries and 80 percent of firewood were harvested in Tisbury. Half of the island's butter production and 4,200 pounds of cheese were also produced in Tisbury in 1850.¹²⁹

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The Athearns and Walronds continued to own the land at Long Point, living as farmers. In the 1860s, John Johnson arrived at Long Point, eventually buying most of the land.

Smaller tracts of woodlots and meadows were subsequently sold to one another and Benjamin Athearn Jr. as well, each person consolidating lands for their needs.¹³⁸

...William Athearn sold "meadow and orchard land and being all my interest in and to the lands belonging to the homestead of Jonathan Athearn (Sr.)" to Jonathan Athearn Jr., who was consolidating land around Nahommon's Neck and Scrubby Neck.¹³⁹

Meanwhile, north of the Watcha Path, the Flint Remedy Company purchased seven of the twelve divisions north of Seconquit. Flint Remedy filed a subdivision plan in 1902, converting 120 acres into 2,345 lots with paper roads bisecting the entire area. Their plan was to convey these lots one by one to purchasers of their patent medicine. This prospect failed, so the lots were eventually sold in bulk.¹⁴¹ This plan marked the first subdivision in the Long Point area. To date, the subdivision still remains only on paper.

Reflective of the more intensive land-use during the nineteenth century, Long Point's natural resources were being heavily used, and a vibrant community existed there. The swamp at the head of Long Cove was now a cranberry bog, with two bridges—a little bridge and a large bridge passing over Long Cove north and south of the bog, respectively, and a dike to control water flow.¹⁴² The farmlands of the Walronds and Athearns surrounded this bog.

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The homestead of Thomas Walrond was on the east side of Deep Bottom Cove down to Thumb Point and included a home, a barn, a corn house, an orchard, a bean field, open pastures and meadows, and a woodlot.¹⁴³ Upon his death, Warren Walrond, who lived at Middle Point, owned 45 acres of woodland, 25 acres of pasture and tillage land, two acres of low meadow, and three acres of English Meadow. On this land he had a dwelling house a barn and small outbuildings. On the meadows were 25 sheep, with a hog and poultry living around the house.¹⁴⁴

Footnote:

No. 143 – 27/302 and 1883 map.

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William Athearn's land at Long Point consisted of English meadows near his home at Nahommon's Neck,¹⁴⁵ meadow, pasture, a Quince orchard, and tillage land, 65 acres of wood land called "Long Point Woods,"¹⁴⁶ 125 acres of land at Charles' Neck, and 100 acres of unimproved land. Interestingly, pastureland was worth 460 percent more per acre than unimproved land at this time—a premium was placed on the labor required for land improvement. One hundred forty-six sheep grazed these pasture lands along with two cows, one heifer, and two horses.¹⁴⁷ In the center of the pastures and hayfields at Long Point was a "stackyard", likely for stacking hay for winter consumption.¹⁴⁸

Jonathan Athearn owned sheep and cow pastures as well as wood lots at his Oakdale Farm on Scrubby Neck and Nahommon's Neck, also called Cranberry Cove Point.

Jonathan owned 118 sheep, two steer, three cows, one horse, one yearling, an ox wagon and cart, and a horse cart. Based on the number of sheep he and his neighbors owned, and looking at the total number of sheep on Martha's Vineyard at the time, Long Point was less heavily grazed than other areas. The grazing intensity, however, maintained the land in an open state, as most of Long Point was open land during this century, save for three woodlots.

Footnotes:

No. 146 – 57/333, described as an active woodlot. This is the same woodlot mentioned in Thomas Walrond's will in 1799 (Probate 9/111).

No. 152 – 31/342, mention of rights to cross land to take seaweed and pond grass. Most estate inventories mentioned fishing gear.

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In the early part of the twentieth century, the transforming events begun in the nineteenth century changed the south shore necks dramatically. Wealthy industrialists set up hunting clubs (fig. 4), oystering companies set up shucking shacks along the shores of Tisbury Great Pond, fishing shacks lined the south

shore, and agriculture and grazing slowly ceased in the Long Point area, with the Tisbury Pond Club owning several sheep.

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The entire area between Tisbury Great Pond and Oyster Pond was now in the hands of hunting clubs.

Trippy and members of the Tisbury Pond Club would ship shot birds and trapped eels in barrels to New York, Falmouth, and Boston.

In 1912, 185 waterfowl were shot at the Tisbury Pond Club, including 99 Bluebills, 29 Black Ducks, 23 Redheads, 16 Coot, 12 Baldpates, and 11 geese.¹⁶⁸ The species they killed changed dramatically year-to-year, based on what species were present on the ponds. Between 1912, and 1919, when they kept a log, 1,861 birds were shot on 334 shooting days, with an average of almost six birds shot per shooting day.

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When the Edgartown-West Tisbury Road was paved, the quickest route for Marshall Norton and other south shore residents became a grassy corridor called Deep Bottom, through which they began to drive and create a road.¹⁷⁰

In order to increase the availability of food for the ducks, such as Canvasbacks and Black Ducks, the caretakers supposedly planted wild rice on the pond shores. In addition, now that the old creek had disappeared under the advancing dunes, a ditch was built connecting Tisbury Great Pond with Long Cove Pond, in order to regulate the water level for ducks feeding on the pondweeds in Long Cove Pond.¹⁷³

Tisbury Great Pond and other great ponds have been opened since at least 1715, the earliest date recorded. That year, Mrs. Johnson D. Whiting rented a team of horses and a driver for \$1.85 to open the pond to the ocean. By the 1900s, the opening of the pond was legally mandated in “An Act to Provide for the Drainage of the Lowlands and Meadows around certain Great Ponds in the County of Dukes County.”

Behind the opening, sand bars would develop so next year’s openings would be cut to the east, where deeper waters existed. By the time the cut was as far east as it could go, deep water necessary to open the pond existed once again to the extreme west.¹⁷⁷

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Camps made of driftwood that washed ashore from boats carrying lumber or shipwrecks served as shucking shacks.

Not all of the focus, however. In 1941, Joseph Walker of Walker and Company purchased land in the northern section of Scrubby Neck. His company manufactured wool, keeping the tradition of sheep grazing alive. Jennie Athearn supposedly also kept a small flock of sheep during her later years.¹⁸⁰

Fires also affected the landscape during this period. The *Vineyard Gazette* recorded the largest fires on the island, most of which were in the spring and affected the Great Plain in the center of the island.¹⁸¹ Four fires affected the Long Point area: one in 1900, which burned in the Scrubby Neck area in April; two in 1929, one of which burned from Waldron’s Bottom in the direction of Oyster Pond, the other which burned two barns at Watcha and all 300 acres owned by Bradley Martin; and one in 1946, which burned most of the divisions of land north of Watcha Path as it roared from Tisbury Great Pond in a northeasterly direction through the Great Plain.¹⁸²

In 1938, a hurricane blew down most of the old orchards in the Long Point area, symbolically ending the age of the traditional family farm that existed for over two hundred years.¹⁸³

Footnote:

No. 181: *Vineyard Gazette*, folder on fires. Between 1903 and 1968, approximately fifteen fires ravaged the Great Plains, burning a total of 40,000 acres (approximately).

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Slowly, the landscape changed (fig. 5), as the hunt clubs ceased grazing and other intensive uses of the land. Fire suppression became more and more effective as well, and fire was effectively eliminated as a factor on the landscape due to several national acts and their implementation early in the twentieth century.¹⁸⁵ The woodlots grew into mature forests, and acted as a source of seed to colonize the abandoned pastures. Scrub Oak and heath species initially colonized the pastures as well as the areas that had burned. Areas with coarse sands, such as to the east and west of Long Cove Pond, remained grasslands longer—a sharp contrast existed between soil types and the rapidity of the landscape change; richer sites turned into oak forests much more quickly. Bottoms, with their coarse soils and short frost-prone growing seasons, changed much more slowly, for the trees and scrub oaks were more frost intolerant as compared with the grasses and ericaceous shrubs. Areas closer to the ocean were more affected by salt spray, which also delayed woody growth. These areas—frost bottoms, coarse sandy lands, and the tips of the south shore necks—...

Footnote:

No. 185 – Also note that the Massachusetts Bay Colony had the first known regulation of fire in the New World; colonists were not allowed to burn prior to March 1 (p. 164).

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Since 1970, the year-round population has doubled, and the seasonal population has increased to over 100,000.¹⁹¹ During the same period, the population of West Tisbury has increased almost 400 percent, making it the fastest growing town on the island.¹⁹² Developed acreage has increased as well, from 15,000 acres to over 40,000 acres.¹⁹³

Protected areas, on the other hand, total just over 15,000 acres.