



CAPE COD TIMES

Opinion

Restoring Herring River habitat is a step toward a healthier climate

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The amazing beaches and stunning ocean waters surrounding the Cape are accompanied by beautiful river ecosystems that support biodiversity and the health of our climate. Among them is the Herring River in Wellfleet.

Years of tidal restriction have eroded this river's water quality, degrading the salt marsh and reducing biodiversity. Extensive scientific study has documented this damage. That science also tells us restoration of this river is possible, with numerous expected benefits.

One benefit is restoration of 1,100 acres of salt marsh. Marine wetlands, including salt marshes, have higher per unit area annual carbon burial rates than forest ecosystems. I had the opportunity to work with the Herring River restoration project team compiling data to support modeling the impact on greenhouse gas emissions of restoring the river and its salt marsh. Exhaustive field work, thorough scientific literature reviews and independently verified quantitative modeling, showed under multiple forecast scenarios that we can expect restoring the river to have a net benefit on carbon capture and greenhouse gas emissions reduction.

We humans have destroyed wetlands at an alarming rate. As awareness of the climate value of wetlands has grown, we have begun to recapture wetland acreage. However, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the gains have occurred in freshwater ecosystems while we continue to lose coastal wetland area. We have a chance to change that for the Herring River. Mitigating climate change happens one ecosystem at a time. We can make our contribution by supporting restoration of the Herring River.

Jackie Fouse, Wellfleet

The writer's property abuts the Herring River restoration site.