

The Provincetown INDEPENDENT

Letters, October 5, 2023

Turtle Mulching

To the editor:

“Terrapin Protection Program Has a Record Year” [[Sept. 28, front page](#)] reminds us that ecological projects with very different goals can work synergistically.

Your article acknowledges that human activity can destroy the turtles’ saltmarsh habitat. Nowhere is that more evident than in the Duck Harbor basin, where a full-tree mulcher began clear-cutting acres of trees last spring in an early phase of the Herring River Restoration Project.

The project’s turtle-protection plan is limited to measures such as contractor education, seasonal restrictions, and reptile-exclusion fencing at construction sites. It does not cover the broad expanse of woodlands and shrublands that will be cleared with heavy equipment. It is likely that the mulcher at Duck Harbor basin has crushed many descendants and cousins of the reptiles that Audubon’s “Team Turtle” has been lovingly protecting. At best, their nesting sites have been severely disrupted.

The organization that drafted the Herring River Project’s turtle-protection plan has been tracking eastern box turtles in the range of the project for several years. Its December 2022 report states: “If initial discharges of brackish water begin during the hibernation or para-hibernation season, when animals are torpid or poorly reactive, significant mortality of known and unknown animals is likely to occur.” The project should take that information into account in finalizing the timeline for opening the tide gates in the new Chequessett Neck Road bridge to inaugurate the tidal restoration.

I hope Mass Audubon’s volunteers will find ways to protect their diamondback friends during the various phases of the Herring River Project. Perhaps they can find and move nesting turtles from the floodplain. That plan should proceed before the mulcher is moved from the Duck Harbor basin to the adjacent Herring River marsh to continue its clear-cutting mission.

Ronald A. Gabel
Yarmouth Port