

Taking the Initiative to Protect the Airport's Environment

By Daniel W. Santos

With the strong support of the Barnstable Town Council and the Town Manager, Barnstable Municipal Airport is embarking on a pair of noteworthy environmental initiatives. These are intended to confirm that airport overseers are acting as responsible environmental stewards of their property, and that activities at the airport are causing no harm to the groundwater — an important water supply source for wells in Hyannis and Yarmouth.

We will invest \$70,000 of the airport's reserves to scientifically assess the health of Upper Gate and Lewis Ponds, situated between our two runways on the north side of the airport. The so-called Stage II Environmental Risk Assessment will examine the quality of the water and sediment in the ponds. Although the study is required by the state, we have moved up its timetable to corroborate the findings of an earlier study that showed no evidence that storm water runoff and minor contaminants in the ponds' sediment have harmed the groundwater.

Additionally, we will undertake a broader, \$92,000 environmental risk assessment to measure the ecological effects of the activities we are undertaking as part of our approved master plan. The Federal Aviation Administration and Aeronautics Division of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation will reimburse the airport up to 97.5 percent of the cost of the study. It should be complete by summer.

All current and future development at the airport is being governed by a series of performance standards, based on the Town of Barnstable's local comprehensive plan and the Cape Cod Commission's Regional Policy Plan. The focus of these standards is the protection of groundwater beneath the airport. Anyone leasing property, renewing a lease or constructing a new facility at the airport is subject to the standards. Key provisions include restrictions on the use of hazardous materials in all new facilities, including the airport's East Ramp; the required

pre-treatment of storm water prior to infiltration into the ground; and, a mandate that all new and existing facilities on the East Ramp must be connected to the town's sewer system.

Operating a busy and modernized airport in a sensitive environmental area is a daily challenge and an expensive one. But my fellow airport commissioners, along with town leaders, are committed to taking the initiative to protect and preserve our priceless resources now and in the future.

Daniel Santos is chairman of the Barnstable Municipal Airport Commission and a registered professional engineer.