

RECOMMENDATIONS¹ APPLICABLE TO ALL BEACHES

Update on Progress for Trustees of the Reservation (TOR) (December 8, 2024)

Progress/Update Observations *in red italics.*

These recommendations apply to most or all the surveyed beaches and take into account that each town and other entities operate multiple beaches and therefore apply many of the same policies, procedures and practices to all their beaches. These recommendations also recognize and reflect the possibility that improvements may be phased in over more than one year.

1. Publicize and otherwise inform the public of the accessibility features of your beach on your own website and print publications as well as through other websites, social media, print publications, and rating sites that the public commonly uses. Below is a non-exhaustive list of suggestions of the latter.

The TOR main website has a page dedicated to accessibility. It includes a map with a legend pointing and describing partially or fully accessible properties. Long Point is included as having waterproof beach wheelchairs and OSV assistance that can be requested at the entrance gate.

See https://thetrustees.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/2021-985-Special-Places-FALL-2021_AccessibilityMap.pdf

Wasque/Cape Pogue properties are not listed as properties which are accessible.

2. Determine and install appropriate signage near and/or at the beach with regard to accessible parking, accessible entrances, accessible facilities, large beach wheelchair(s) and floating wheelchair(s).

Very limited and no improvements since self survey in 2023 and recommendations in April 2024.

3. Ensure that involved staff have the requisite information to carry out their responsibilities with respect to accessibility e.g. staff who are the contact points for inquiries, calls and information; lifeguards; or other onsite or offsite staff.

Not formally determined though the TOR's MV portfolio director and beach manager are sensitive to the importance of accessibility and have taken steps to improve accessibility.

4. We recommend that the elements and actions necessary to achieve accessibility be organized into an action plan with timelines and responsible persons and be approved by the necessary authorities to best assure that the goals are achieved. Also, set timelines for easily achieved elements so that they can be in place for the upcoming season. For other elements, a phased-in approach over one or more of the following seasons may be reasonable or necessary.

*Several requests have been made for the development of an action plan, but none has been furnished to date. **One, or at least a draft, is requested for all TOR beaches and related areas on the Vineyard by the end of December 2024 understanding that many of the improvements need to be prioritized and staggered over two years and possibly in some cases three.***

5. One additional caveat. The recommendations made for each beach took into account that there are recognized situations in which full accessibility cannot be achieved. These are

¹ Our February 2024 report which contained our Island-wide findings contain many of these recommendations. They were reiterated in our April 10, 2024 recommendations specific to TOR and Long Point.

incorporated in various federal and state laws and standards. Most relevant are exceptions contained in the USDA Accessibility Guidebook, pp. 31-35, 76.² Four exceptions to full accessibility compliance are recognized—

- a. Where compliance is not practical due to terrain.
- b. Compliance cannot be accomplished with the prevailing construction practices.
- c. Where compliance with the technical requirement would fundamentally alter the function or purpose of the facility or the setting.
- d. Where compliance is precluded because cultural, historic, or significant natural features are protected under federal, state, or local law.

In the beaches we reviewed across the Island, with very few exceptions we found that full accessibility compliance was feasible. However, we did not perform the kind of in depth assessment that may have revealed all the facts or factors which would trigger one the exceptions. That said under the USDA guidebook, given modern technology and the importance of accessibility, the standards for each exception are very strict. And even when full accessibility cannot be achieved, as much accessibility as possible should be provided.

6. For any significant changes or improvements to the beaches, it is recommended that input be obtained from the public, including especially from individuals with disabilities or other groups most directly affected, such as senior citizens. This could be done by surveying, solicitation of written or electronic communication, and/or at a public hearing.

Here are some apps or websites that can, and in some cases already provide, information about accessible elements and features about Martha’s Vineyard beaches.

- Trails MV (maintained by Sheriff’s Meadow Foundation)
- MV Chamber of Commerce <https://www.mvy.com/beaches-marthas-vineyard/?ss360SearchTerm=beaches>
- Vineyard Visitor by MV Times <https://vineyardvisitor.com/category/see-do/beaches/https://vineyardvisitor.com/2017/09/11/shoulder-season-way-onto-lamberts-cove-beach/>
- <https://mvol.com/beaches/> MV Gazette
- MA DCR. https://www.mass.gov/info-details/accessible-beaches?_gl=1*1suykta*_ga*NDI2ODMxMzE2LjE3MTAwMzcyMTY.*_ga_MCLPEGW7WM*MTcxMDAzNzMyNi4xLjAuMTcxMDAzNzMyNi4wLjAuMA

Richard Cohen, Dukes County Associate Commissioner for Disabilities
December 10, 2024

² <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Accessibility-Guide-Book.pdf>

