



## Town Must Fund Pollution Research

*Surprisingly little is being done in the way of data collection by East Hampton Town*  
By Editorial | July 28, 2016 - 12:18pm

For all the attention being paid to water quality on the South Fork, surprisingly little is being done in the way of data collection by East Hampton Town itself. And, in the absence of regular town or county testing, the East Hampton Town Trustees and Concerned Citizens of Montauk, in partnership with the Surfrider Foundation, have had to fill the gap to the best of their abilities.

Their findings have been alarming. Christopher Gobler, a Stony Brook University scientist hired by the trustees for an ongoing project, has found toxic algae in several ponds, as well as dangerously low oxygen levels. Based on fecal coliform tests, Dr. Gobler at one point recommended shellfish closures much more sweeping than those now in place. Among the most startling of his recommendations was that Napeague Harbor, which was previously believed to be essentially pristine, should be closed to shellfish harvesting between May and October.

In its recent testing, C.C.O.M.-Surfrider found high levels of enterococcus bacteria, associated with fecal waste, in parts of Lake Montauk, Pussy's Pond in Springs (which drains into Accabonac Harbor), Georgica Pond in East Hampton, and Fresh Pond in Amagansett, as well as shockingly high results at Sagg Pond in Sagaponack. These vital tests have come from organizations that saw a need for information and tried to provide it, not from the main town governing body or the state or county.

To underline the need for the data, the Lombardo Associates wastewater plan for the town observes that, at the very least, additional studies should be conducted in Lake Montauk. Furthermore, the plan comes right out and says that because bacteria are not systematically measured throughout town, there is no way of knowing if swimming is actually safe in the bays and ocean. The necessary scientific studies, Lombardo wrote, to

restore water quality have not been done. The firm said the county's current regimen of one sampling station per harbor in East Hampton Town is unfortunately limited, while it lauded the trustees for providing valuable insights by funding Dr. Gobler's work.

This is all alarming and makes us wonder what the heck Town Hall is thinking. If improving water quality is such an important goal — and we've heard officials say it is — the starting point has to be carefully gathered information. It is disappointing that the town has shirked this responsibility, passing it on to the cash-strapped trustees and two private organizations. If the town is to get serious about water pollution, it must fund the research first.