

THE INDEPENDENT

NEWS & OPINION

WHAT OFFICIALS ARE DOING TO MITIGATE THE DETERIORATION OF OUR WATER RESOURCES.

Solutions Underway & In Process

APRIL 10, 2018BY | [Kitty Merrill](#)

The protection of water quality has supplanted the protection of land and open space as the region's number one environmental issue.

"No area of the state is more water dependent than we are," Assemblyman Fred Thiele opined this week. What happened on the land and to the land was the primary focus, he put forth. "Now it's water and water quality."

While the issues — and contamination — are widespread and complex, the assemblyman noted that the East End of Long Island specifically, and Suffolk County in general, "are more ahead of the curve on environmental issues than anywhere else in the state."

Still, he emphasized, "There's no silver bullet. It took decades for us to get like this, and it will take decades of commitment [to reverse]. If we stick with it, we can improve our water quality."

Below, find some of the potential solutions to contamination mentioned in the accompanying article.

PFOS, PFOA

Just this week, Thiele reported yet another site in the district where water samples tested positive for the chemicals perfluorooctane sulfonate, or PFOS, and perfluorooctanoic acid, or PFOA. The chemicals, he said this week, "seem to be ubiquitous out here."

And the first line of defense? "Stop drinking the water," he said. Because so many homes are served by private wells, and the chemical has been found in so many disparate communities, the assemblyman believes it's time to consider the extension of public water throughout the entire region.

Suffolk County Water Authority has the technology to filter the toxins out of its water. "We can't keep dealing with this on an ad hoc basis," he said. Municipalities need to move forward with a comprehensive public water plan for the region, Thiele believes. "If there's ever a distinct and real threat to our drinking water supply," he said, "that's this chemical."

CYNOBACTERIA, Saxitoxin

Some 50 water bodies on Long Island — most on the East End — were monitored for Harmful Algal Blooms last summer. While the exact cause of HABs is not fully understood, blooms occur most often in waters high in phosphorus and/or nitrogen.

Last fall, Senator Charles Schumer called on Congress to quickly pass the “Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Act.” Ecological hypoxia is the depletion of oxygen in the water and the most common cause of fish kills. Schumer says the bill would help combat the recent rise in toxic algae found in Long Island waterways. He warned that, left unchecked, these toxic blooms could contaminate drinking water for Long Island residents, as well as damage the local economy dependent on fishing and recreation.

The bill would authorize \$22 million a year for five years (2019-2023) to help conduct research on harmful algal blooms and continue an interagency working group to advance the understanding of hypoxia and HABs. Additionally, the bill requires that the task force submit a scientific assessment of harmful algal blooms in US coastal waters and freshwater systems to Congress at least every five years.

Enterococci

For the last five years the Concerned Citizens of Montauk, in collaboration with Surfrider Foundation’s nationwide Blue Water Task Force, has been sampling water bodies in East Hampton and Southampton for the presence of the bacteria enterococci. Said CCOM President Laura Tooman this week, “Our ground and surface waters are suffering from decades of improper and overdevelopment where there was very little regard for the pollution generated and where it went.

“There are a few things we can do. First, we must try to understand the problem. For example, CCOM has partnered with the US Geological Survey to identify the sources of nitrogen and bacteria in Lake Montauk. Once we know where the pollution is coming from, we can identify, prioritize, and implement the most effective solutions, whether it be stormwater remediation projects, septic upgrades, or other pollutant reducing initiatives.

“Lastly, everyone must take accountability for their actions and do something about it. Sign up for Save the Lake—Save the Pond and get your septic pumped, or even better, replaced; don’t use fertilizers or pesticides; don’t irrigate your property, and only use native plants!”

Methoprene

County officials have finally acknowledged the benefits of reducing the use of the pesticide. The goal, according to Legislator Bridget Fleming is to “balance the interests of the homeowners and restore the ecosystems in Accabonac Harbor to prevent infestations of mosquitoes.” To that end, Fleming favors a strategy that entails restoring vegetation to improve habitats for mosquito predators and reducing standing water to get the wetlands moving again.

She reported the East Hampton Town Trustees agreed to consider a pilot project comprised of singling out an area for wetland restoration and cessation of methoprene application.

Last fall, Kevin McAllister, president of Defend H2O launched a petition on change.org. looking to ban the use of the larvicide. McAllister has also asked state lawmakers to support bills sponsored by Senator Ken LaValle and Assemblyman Thiele.

Companion bills would, if adopted, prohibit the use of methoprene in “any storm drain, conveyance for water, or fish habitat in any municipality adjoining the Long Island Sound and the Atlantic Ocean and their connecting water bodies, bays, harbors, shallows and marshes.” In cases of a significant threat to public health, however, it could still be used.

“Methoprene is designed to kill things,” Adrienne Esposito, executive director of the Citizens Campaign for the Environment, explained. “It stops the molting of mosquitoes. Does it weaken the lobsters and crabs in their molting? There’s not enough science done on this,” she said.

“The question really is, do we need all these chemicals to stop mosquitoes?” she continued. “Healthy wetlands keep mosquito populations in check.” Natural predators like birds, bats, other insects, and killie fish could help keep the population at bay.

The Sand Land Stew

When raw data collected from water sampling beneath the Noyac sand mine was released last month, environmentalists from the Group for the East End and CCE, as well as members of the Noyac Civic Council called for the closure of the mine. It's run out of sand, and has allegedly morphed into an illegal dumpsite. "That we're even thinking about allowing hard core industrial uses in a residential area, that's a folly, and we're seeing the impacts of it," Thiele said. The mine is a pre-existing nonconforming business in Noyac; its potential impact wasn't foreseen when operations there commenced decades ago.

Soon after the test sample data was released, county health department officials responded to public pressure and began testing private wells in a large area around the mine.

Beyond specifically targeted solutions to immediate contamination crises, lawmakers have enacted legislation designed to help improve overall water quality on Long Island. A portion of the Community Preservation Fund may now be used to offer rebates to East End homeowners who upgrade their septic systems. Suffolk County provides concurrent rebates.

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