



For Immediate Release:

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CCOM PARTNERS WITH GOBLER LAB TO MONITOR HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOMS IN FORT POND, MONTAUK

Montauk, New York – Concerned Citizens of Montauk (CCOM) today announced their partnership with Dr. Christopher Gobler of Stony Brook University on an intense harmful algal bloom (HAB) monitoring program to be conducted in Fort Pond.

While most algae are harmless and often play an integral part in any aquatic ecosystem, some, like the blue-green algae (cyanobacteria), which was detected in Fort Pond during the summers of 2015 and 2017, produce toxins that can be harmful to humans and animals. In fact, the swimming portion of the 2017 Mightyman Montauk Triathlon was canceled due to the presence of a severe and toxic bloom.

Until now, sampling of the cyanobacteria blooms in Fort Pond has been sporadic and infrequent, with only a handful of samples taken. Starting in May 2018, samples will be taken by CCOM and analyzed by the Gobler Lab every other week. Then, beginning in June 2018, samples will be taken and analyzed weekly. Results will be posted to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's HAB Notification Website and circulated along with CCOM's enterococcus testing results. Gobler's results will be analyzed by the New York State Department of Health and Suffolk County Department of Health Services to determine if and when health or swimming advisories should be issued.

Dr. Gobler is a professor at Stony Brook University's School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences and Director of New York State's Center for Clean Water Technology. Dr. Gobler's lab is currently under contract to analyze freshwater samples for the presence of blue-green algae in the New York City and Long Island region for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

Dr. Gobler noted, "Blue-green algae represent a serious threat to the health of humans, pets, and aquatic life. Blue-green algae blooms have been sporadically detected in Fort Pond, but frankly, the monitoring of this water body has been entirely haphazard and thus very little is known about them. A consistent, time-series monitoring program such as this will serve as the foundation for establishing the extent of the problem, which is the first step toward devising a solution."

Laura Tooman, President of Concerned Citizens of Montauk said, "We must do a better job at understanding the blooms, their frequency, and their length; we must do a better job at educating the community about the threats; and we must do a better job at fixing the problem."

Harmful algal blooms are typically fueled by increased nutrient loadings from septic systems and stormwater runoff. Mitigating direct discharges of stormwater and replacing outdated and ineffective cesspools and septic systems with new innovative alternative systems, which have higher nitrogen treatment capabilities can help remedy the problem. Suffolk County and the Town of East Hampton offer significant financial assistance for septic replacement.

“To safeguard our water quality, New York State is working with organizations like the Concerned Citizens of Montauk and experts at Stony Brook University to study the causes of algal blooms across the state which are often fueled by high nitrogen and phosphorous levels,” DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos said. “Through the Governor’s Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan (LINAP) initiative, DEC is working with many partners to resolve the nitrogen pollution in the waters of Long Island. As part of that initiative, Suffolk County received \$10 million through the State Septic System Replacement Fund to continue to help residences install septic systems that will remove a significant amount of nitrogen. We look forward to the result of the study providing more information on nitrogen pollution and the HABs problem in Long Island.”

Suffolk County Legislator Bridget Fleming noted, “Harmful algal blooms are increasingly prevalent in our local ponds, lakes, and waterways, such as Fort Pond, and can prevent residents and visitors from enjoying the natural resources that attract so many to our East End community. In order to prevent harmful algal blooms we must develop a more complete understanding of the factors that allow these bacteria to flourish. The biweekly sampling of Fort Pond starting in May, and weekly sampling starting in June, will allow for a first-of-its-kind monitoring at the site. This will lead to an increased understanding of harmful algal blooms with the goal of the full restoration of year-round accessibility for one of our cherished community treasures.”

“We welcome and applaud this partnership between C.C.O.M. and Dr. Gobler, of Stony Brook University, which will provide additional data to reinforce the town’s efforts to address water pollution, and protect public health,” said East Hampton Town Supervisor Peter Van Scoyoc. “Water quality protection and improvement projects undertaken throughout the town, from legislation requiring the use of nitrogen-reducing septic systems to remediating storm water runoff from roadways, to habitat restoration efforts such as the community oyster grower’s program, are having a positive influence on the quality of our ground and surface waters. We look forward to better understanding the water quality issues faced in Fort Pond and implementing solutions to protect and restore this valuable asset.”

Peter Scully, Deputy Suffolk County Executive said, “Enhanced monitoring of water quality is a critically important facet of a broader overall strategy to address the threats posed by cyanobacteria and other harmful algal blooms. Suffolk County’s Harmful Algal Bloom Action Plan is the very first of its kind. The HAB Action Plan draws on the knowledge of experts from across the nation, and it envisions working partnerships like this one as part of the overall effort to address HAB concerns.”

On Wednesday, May 16, Suffolk County Department of Health Services and New York Sea Grant will be hosting the “2018 Suffolk County Harmful Algal Bloom Symposium” to present the Suffolk County Harmful Algal Bloom Action as well as an update about mitigating actions being conducted in waters that affect the Suffolk County watershed.