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Montauk Group Pitches Floating Island To Clean Fort Pond

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By Michael Wright

The Concerned Citizens of Montauk are applying to the Peconic Estuary Program to help fund the creation of an experimental “floating island” in Montauk’s centerpiece Fort Pond as a possible elixir to the woes caused in recent years by toxic algae blooms.



The group, along with East Hampton Town, will ask the Suffolk County-funded estuary program for \$27,000 to help purchase the components of the floating island, which would support vegetation specially chosen for its ability to soak up nutrients that feed algae blooms.

“Fort Pond in Montauk is literally dying,” said Laura Tooman, president of the Concerned Citizens of Montauk, which has spearheaded a broad water quality monitoring and improvement campaign throughout the hamlet. “We have significant nutrient inflow issues, which causes harmful algae blooms in the summer to the point where it is harmful to go into [the pond] if you are an animal at all.”

The floating island proposal applies the same principles of a pilot project conducted by the town near the mouth of Pussy’s Pond in Springs last summer. There, large aquatic plants called sugar kelp were planted in the water along the banks of the dreen near the Springs General Store to absorb nutrients flowing out of the small headwater into Accabonac Harbor.

Rather than planting the plants on the banks of the pond, the Fort Pond pilot would have them anchored in large floating mats, which could then be moored in a portion of the pond with high nutrient influxes from runoff or groundwater intrusion. When water temperatures drop in the fall, the island would be removed and the large plants cut out of it. Ms. Tooman suggested that they then could be used as nutrient fertilizer at the Montauk Community Garden.

Ms. Tooman credited a water quality engineer working for Ruschmeyer’s hotel and restaurant, Jason Beury, with suggesting the idea.

High levels of nutrients in Fort Pond have sparked dense blooms of blue-green algae that naturally emit a toxin that can be harmful or even fatal to any animal that ingests water from the pond. The State Department of Environmental Conservation has posted warnings about coming in contact with the pond’s waters in each of the last three summers, and the blooms have forced the cancellation or relocation of the swimming leg of a triathlon that has traditionally been held in the pond.

The high amounts of nutrients are fed into the pond by runoff from local roads, fertilizers from lawns and leaking septic outflows from the residential neighborhoods in its large watershed.

“We’ve had a death by a thousand cuts up there,” said Councilman David Lys at a recent East Hampton Town Board meeting, in recommending that the town agree to support CCOM in seeking the grant as one step in addressing the pollution. “It’s going to take a thousand remedies.”