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## Federal study identifies causes of river pollution

**By Bryan Finlayson**

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers released a statement summarizing a reconnaissance study of environmental challenges facing the Forge River, three days before County Legislator Kate Browning announced a press conference calling for a sewer district that would help reduce pollution flowing into the river.

Some Forge River advocates said the reconnaissance study confirmed what residents and environmentalists have been saying for the last several years about fish kills, algae blooms and odors in the river. A summary of the study noted that duck farms, stormwater runoff and contaminants from septic systems are likely degrading the river's ecosystem.

At a Forge River Task Force meeting on Monday, the Corps cautioned that the \$200,000 reconnaissance study does not draw any conclusions and that another study is needed.

Copies of the 20-page reconnaissance study will be released to task force members within two weeks.

"We've done this over and over again and we are getting tired of doing this over and over again," said MaryAnn Johnston, president of both the Manor Park Civic Association and the Affiliated Brookhaven Civic Organization.

The task force meeting was the first since 6th District Councilman Keith Romaine, the chairman of the group, took office. The group's last meeting was in November. The task force was established in 2005 to develop a plan to combat the declining health of the river. Pollutants, including nitrogen from sources such as septic tanks, stormwater runoff and duck farms, have been blamed for causing foul odors and unnatural fish kills in the river in recent years. Monday's meeting came three days before Ms. Browning's office announced she and Legislator Wayne R. Horsley are exploring bringing a sewage treatment plant and infrastructure to the Mastic-Shirley community "in an effort to revitalize the downtown and reduce nitrogen pollution in the Forge River," the statement said.

Mr. Horsley and Ms. Browning did not return calls for comment. A press conference on the plan was held yesterday.

While many projects are being talked about, some members at Monday's task force meeting, including Peconic Baykeeper Kevin McAllister, said not enough work was being done to rehabilitate the river.

"There's been a lot of frustration in the community about a lack of action," Mr. McAllister said. "I think it would help to get some projects done."

Some complained the task force has no money to initiate cleanup projects.

A moratorium on some new construction that would have had the effect of blocking additional nitrogen from entering the river and killing wildlife was defeated by the Brookhaven Town Board in December. Builders and local property owners protested the measure, which would have prevented construction of septic systems on more than 11,000 parcels of land surrounding the Forge River for 18 months so a comprehensive blueprint to restore the river could be developed.

Ms. Johnston pressed Mr. Romaine to reintroduce the measure.

"If there needs to be amendments to the moratorium, then let's change it and get it off the ground," she said.

Mr. Romaine questioned whether the moratorium was necessary since it would block new septic systems from being built, but ignore existing septic tanks.

Existing septic tanks "are the violators" because a majority "predate Suffolk County health code" and do most of the polluting, the councilman said. He also noted a lack of support for the measure in the community.

"A lot of residents do not want this moratorium," Mr. Romaine said. "That needs to be taken into account."

The Corps said a new study is needed to quantify what is polluting the river most. After that, solutions can be developed to bring life back to the river, said U.S. Army Corps project manager Carrie McCabe.

A new study, called a feasibility study, could cost anywhere from \$1 million to \$3 million, a cost that must be shared with

either the state, county or town, Ms. Mc-Cabe said.

Mr. Romaine said he would send a letter to the county requesting a pledge for the money.

"We want to make a case that there are a lot of problems [with the river]," Ms. McCabe said. "It seems like it would be a clear-cut case where there could be a federal interest in cleaning up this water body.

"Moving into the feasibility stage is dependent on finding a local sponsor or we wont proceed without one," Ms. McCabe added.