

Restoring Middle Farms Pond

Middle Farms Pond has become contaminated with elevated levels of nitrates, turbidity, bacteria and algae. Although the causes are not yet clear, human activities, including potential septic leeching and fertilizer run-off, as well as boating, fishing and swimming are all potential contributing factors.

The risks are serious. For example, nitrates can cause algae blooms. While not all algae blooms are toxic, some produce a type of toxin called microcystis that can cause serious liver damage under certain conditions.

Fishers Island Water Works Corporation owns the pond and is responsible for monitoring its quality. Under the Fishers Island Water Protection Standards adopted by the Suffolk County Department of Health Services in 1997, we are also responsible for monitoring compliance with land use restriction that apply to the surrounding primary watershed.

To start the process of restoring the health of the pond, we are placing it off limits to the public. Various information and warning notices will be posted around the pond.

The absence of human activity will facilitate testing the pond water to identify the causes of contamination and target efforts to eliminate them. We have already sent notices to surrounding landowners, requesting their help in identifying potential sources of contamination in the watershed, particularly on ground sloping toward the pond and any level areas within 150 yards of the shore. Fertilizers, pesticides, septic tanks and fuel storage tanks are among the possible hazards. Earlier this year we welded shut an access point where tank trucks were tapping into the pond with potentially contaminated hoses.

Closing Middle Farms Pond to boating will address another threat: the potential introduction of the invasive Zebra mussel. This fingernail-size mussel can attach itself to a boat or paddleboard that is used in another body of water and then used in Middle Farms Pond. There would be no way to eradicate the bivalve from the pond once that happens.

By removing sources of contamination and avoiding a mussel infestation, the pond could have water that is potable with little filtration within a few years. Although we are moving to produce more water from wells, preserving both Middle Farms and Barlow Ponds as back-up reservoirs is an important part of our strategy for assuring ample water supply despite the uncertainties of climate change. During droughts in the 1960s, for example, water was pumped from Middle Farms Pond to Barlow Pond for filtration and distribution into the island's water mains.

Everyone's understanding and cooperation with this initiative will be very much appreciated. We know that Middle Farms Pond has been enjoyed by boaters, fishermen and swimmers. Yet, we strongly believe that conserving this natural resource is part of responsible environmental stewardship and in the best interest of the water supply for the entire island community.

Please feel free to contact company President, Chris Finan, or Water Superintendent, Chad Mrowka, on 631-788-7251 with any questions.

FISHERS ISLAND WATER WORKS CORPORATION

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