



Mystic Lake's water quality plan clearer

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September 02, 2009 2:00 AM

MARSTONS MILLS — Pieces of dried shells still circle the shores of Mystic Lake like an ancient mussel burial ground. But an alum treatment plan negotiated recently by state and local conservation officials could help clear the waters both now and for years to come, they said this week.

For years, town conservation officers have petitioned the state's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species program for permission to treat the water with aluminum sulfate, or alum, to restore oxygen levels to the deteriorating waters. But program officers have resisted, due largely to the presence of three "threatened" mussel species in the lake, considered one of the top three in the state in terms of rare mussels, they said.

Less than two weeks ago, thousands of mussels washed up dead and decaying on the shores of the lake, which borders Race Lane.

The two sides arrived at a settlement Monday, agreeing in principle to a liquid alum treatment plan that would help prevent algae from growing, restoring oxygen levels in the water and preserving the lake habitat, said Holly Hobart, president of the Indian Ponds group, which monitors water quality in the lake,

"This is very good news for Mystic Lake and all who use it," she said yesterday. "It means we can finally do something about the problems that have plagued this lake for years."

The town conservation office agreed to change the terms of its treatment plan, according to Rob Gatewood, Barnstable's Conservation Administrator.

Despite initial hesitations, town officers agreed to go with about half the alum concentration as originally planned; to locate the injections only in the deepest parts of the lake; and to authorize regular monitoring of the lake in the months and years to come.

"We believe the project can still be effective (under those conditions)," Gatewood said.

Others, however, aren't as convinced.

John Doriss, a member of the Friends of the Skunknet and the Bumps River Basins preservation group, said that the alum treatment doesn't follow the town or the state's goals to keep poisons and contaminants out of the water.

The alum could help destroy the mussel populations and the lake habitat over the long term, Doris said.

"This alum effort appears to be the quick fix," he said, "and although it may benefit (the lake) visually ... it could do far more harm than good."

With initial approval from the state, the project will now go through the state's wetlands protection review process, said Tom French, director of the Endangered Species program — and then on to the Barnstable Conservation Commission for final approval.

The Town Council will also likely have to authorize additional funding, beyond the \$275,000 approved for the project last year, to cover the monitoring tests for up to seven years after the treatment, said Gatewood, the town conservation administrator.

If the approval and the funding fall into place, the project could move forward by November, said Hobart, of the Indian Ponds group.