

Written by Edward F. Maroney

Boat tour underscores efforts to keep water clean

George Hampson of Falmouth starts his tours of the Three Bays – Cotuit, North and West – in a rather unappetizing manner.

On one side of the dock, he points to brown water that reveals a buildup of nutrients, mostly from state-approved septic systems that nevertheless don't process nitrogen.

On the other side, he scoops up a handful of glop that he identifies as codium, also known as green fleece, an invasive species that washed ashore 40 years ago. Anyone who signed up for the Three Bays Preservation tours June 20 looking for a lark on the water soon was considering the ways we foul the things we love.

As the tour boat moved passed a Cotuit-based vessel named Exhale, Hampson checked the oxygen supply in Cotuit Bay. It was 9.0 milliliters at the surface, but, "On the bottom is where the problem is," he said. "3.0 is the danger point for fish to survive."

Next, Hampson dropped a Secchi disk into the drink to check transparency, another way to judge the health of a water body. "It's murkier than I thought," he said.

Heading up the bay, the boat passed the Oyster Harbors Club on the eastern shore, and tales were told about Hannah Screecham, said to have consorted at that location with pirates – well before the club's time, of course. Some say they can still hear her screeching at Noisy Point.

Those who love the bays will be screeching someday about the nutrients that make their way down from Prince's Cove to pollute the resource, Hampson said.

"What can you do with a \$200,000 dock on Prince's Cove?" he asked. "Can you swim?" "No," someone replied. "Can you kayak?" "Not really." "Can you shellfish?" "No."

The tour continued past an aquaculture project and up into North Bay, passing the complex of Osterville boat yards before passing under the bridge into West Bay and down the Seapuit River alongside Dead Neck, a bird sanctuary protected by electric fencing.



EDWARD F. MARONEY PHOTO

NOT SO INCOGNITO – Dr. Brian Howes, director of the Massachusetts estuaries project, tried to keep a low profile on a boat tour of the Three Bays June 20. He wound up sharing a few insights.

Then it was back to the landing, just in time to enjoy another June shower.