

Study: Orleans ponds at risk

■ Most studied have high phosphorus levels and low oxygen.

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ORLEANS — Key swimming and fishing ponds in town are increasingly polluted by man-made sources, including wastewater, fertilizer and run-off from roads, according to a new study.

Crystal Lake, Baker's Pond and Pilgrim Lake are among 18 ponds studied over six years by the town and the Cape Cod Commission, according to commission water resources manager Ed Eichner.

"Pretty much all the ponds in town have the same problem," Eichner told selectmen Wednesday night. "The ponds in Orleans are not in good condition."

Eichner said Baker's Pond is

an exception and "poster child for good water quality" but poses some long-term concerns. He also discounted Cedar Pond because of salty rather than fresh water characteristics.

The 16 other freshwater ponds studied failed state standards for phosphorus and dissolved oxygen, and "conditions will only worsen in time," Eichner said, citing phosphorus moving slowly in groundwater toward the ponds after years of development on surrounding land. Phosphorus is a nutrient that can fuel explosive algae growth, clouding the water and depriving aquatic life of oxygen.

The public airing of the commission study comes as local officials are working on a plan to manage the town's septic needs, including which neighborhoods need treatment plants and where to run sewer lines.

"My hope is that we will incorporate the needs of the ponds

as well as estuaries in the plan, because we really can help both by putting the sewage lines in the right place," said Carolyn Kennedy, chairwoman of the town Marine and Freshwater Quality Task Force, which helped gather data for the pond study.

Eichner said Orleans officials should develop plans for treating the ponds with dredging or chemicals. He said local officials also should consider studying water quality in all of the town's ponds, which would require testing about 40 more ponds.

Not everybody agrees that the ponds should get cleaned up.

Kennedy said a competing approach would use Orleans' ponds as a settling place for nitrogen, a nutrient that pollutes coastal waters, before nitrogen in groundwater reaches the town's estuaries.

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