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# County, state aim to clean up Forge River

By Bryan Finlayson

A Suffolk County project to filter stormwater runoff seeping into the Forge River could dramatically reduce pollution in the embattled river, Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy said while standing on its banks this week.

Mr. Levy highlighted the \$647,500 project, which calls for 30 catch basins to be installed along a section of Montauk Highway between Barnes and Mastic roads, during a press conference on Tuesday in Moriches. The project, which is expected to treat runoff in a nearly 10-acre section of the river's watershed, will be a joint undertaking between Suffolk County and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

Meanwhile, the Town of Brookhaven took another step toward the completion of its Forge River Watershed Management Plan, which will recommend actions for improving water quality in the river.

Pollution in the Forge River has been blamed for causing low oxygen levels, fish kills and harmful algae blooms.

The stormwater remediation project is part of a larger \$21 million Montauk Highway redevelopment effort, in which additional lanes and traffic lights will be installed along a section of the highway from Barnes Road in Moriches west to William Floyd Parkway in Shirley. Construction of the catch basins is expected to be completed by next spring. The cost of the project is being split 50-50 by the state and county, with each share being \$323,750.

"We thought it was high time that we introduce it here, in this area, to help restore the Forge River," Mr. Levy said on Tuesday. "It is our intention to do everything we can to restore this river to its pristine condition."

Nonetheless, much more work remains to be done if the Forge River is to be revitalized, county officials and river advocates said this week.

Suffolk County Legislator Kate Browning called the project "much needed," but cautioned that the area also needs sewers to reduce groundwater pollution.

Ms. Browning, who has advocated for a sewer district to service businesses along Montauk Highway, said a sewer district study has stalled due to a lack of funding. The study would enable the county to move forward with installing a sewer district in the area.

"My understanding is that it's sitting, collecting dust," Ms. Browning said of the study.

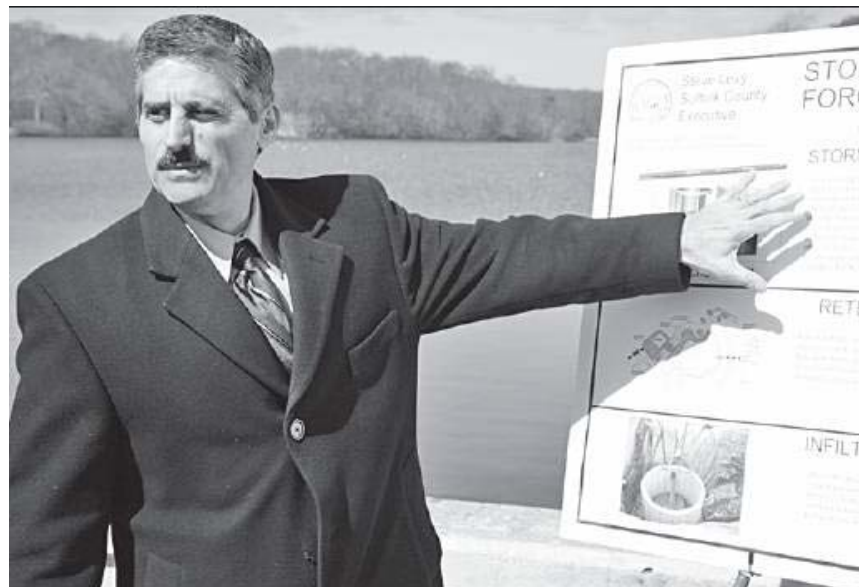
Sixth District Town Councilman Keith Romaine, who also supports the installation of sewers on Montauk Highway, said the county should help finance the needed \$100,000 to finish the study, which calls for a sewer treatment plant to be built on the grounds of Calabro Airport in Shirley.

"The longer we wait to enact a sewer district, the longer it will take to put sewer lines in and the more polluted our waters will become," Mr. Romaine said.

DEC Regional Director Peter Scully, who attended Tuesday's press conference, named septic tanks as a leading cause of pollution in the river.

"I don't want to sugarcoat it, this river faces some major challenges," Mr. Scully said. "The most difficult one is about how to address the fact that groundwater is the largest single source of pollution because of all the cesspools on the peninsula."

Save the Forge River President Ron Lupski hailed the county's stormwater project, but said it only addresses one part of



Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy announced on Tuesday a plan to filter pollutants from stormwater before it enters the Forge River.

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myriad problems facing the Forge River.

The Jurgielwicz Duck Farm, located on Barnes Road, is a major contributor of pollution to the river, Mr. Lupski alleged. Save the Forge River is currently suing the farm's owners in federal court over allegations that the farm's pollution filtration system failed to comply with state permits. "You got probably 19 percent of that pollution coming from them and running under the highway," Mr. Lupski said.

He said the \$647,500 for the county project could have been put toward installing sewers in the area.

"Although this project is great—I don't know—I just think the money could be better spent putting in the dry sewer line along the highway," Mr. Lupski said.

In a separate project, the Brookhaven Town Board on Tuesday awarded a \$100,000 contract to Cameron Engineering and Associates to complete an assessment of the river called the Forge River Watershed Management Plan.

The management plan, in addition to addressing stormwater remediation, will also provide a "comprehensive response to the deterioration in water quality and environmental conditions in the Forge River," town documents state.

The plan is expected to be completed by the end of this year, allowing the town to act on recommendations in the plan by 2010.

Responding to concerns over stormwater entering the Forge River last year, the town installed 15 catch basins along Overlook Drive in Mastic. However, Brookhaven Environmental Protection Director John Turner said that further investment in stormwater remediation would not be forthcoming until the watershed management plan was finished.

"It doesn't make a lot of sense to dump large sums of money on what seems to be a problem ... when we find out that money could have been better spent elsewhere," Mr. Turner said.