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## Mastic, N.Y., Residents Say Forge River 'Like Cesspool'

Jul. 14--Generations of Mastic residents have enjoyed the perks of waterfront property on the Forge River, but some say that lately, floating fish, murky water and an unbearable stench are making them sick.

"It's exactly like a cesspool," said Bill Lupski, 75, a retired Mastic boat captain.

Lupski and his son, Ronnie, grew up along the river and have seen it deteriorate over the past 25 years. When Lupski found crabs, shrimp and baby eels belly-up in the creek near his home in early June, he called the Suffolk County Health Department to test the dingy water.

"There's a discharge," he said, "but when you ask, 'From who?' everyone hides their heads in the sand."

For three weeks in June, county health officials tested 13 spots along the waterways, but they refused to share the findings with the public.

At a press conference in the Forge River Boat Club yesterday, Suffolk County Legislator Peter O'Leary held what he said was the only copy of the county Health Department's July 12 report, which blamed unusual weather for the declining levels of dissolved oxygen in the water.

During warm weather, it is common for oxygen levels in water to fall, said Kevin McAllister, president of the Peconic Baykeeper, but at sites such as Wills Creek, the levels hit zero, making it impossible for marine life to survive.

McAllister was patrolling the Forge on June 16 when he noticed a smelly, grayish film along the shore and conducted his own tests. Along with cripplingly low oxygen levels, he found lots of nitrogen in the river, suggesting the heat wave may have only exacerbated a bigger, man-made problem.

"Many experts are trying to categorize this as a recent problem and a natural phenomena, but the people who live here would argue differently," said Brookhaven Town Councilman Edward Hennessey, who cited roadway runoff, pollution from sewage plants and drainage as the major threats to what his favorite boyhood swimming spot.

"The river has a diminished immune system," said Harry Wallace, chief of the Poospatuck Creek Indian Reservation, home to the Unkechaug tribe since the early 1900s. He has seen the rates of diabetes, cancer and other diseases rise within his tribe after years of drinking from and fishing in the surrounding waterway. Wallace said his tribal council is committed to working with all levels of government to restore the river to the healthy state that he vaguely remembered while looking at a photo dated 1910.

A specific plan to address the problem has not be finalized, Hennessey said, adding, "Once we find out what's harming our precious river, we will act immediately to stop it."

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