

Press Release
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The Herring Ponds Watershed Association Raises \$10,000 for Water Quality Plan

Last summer, just before the July 11th weekend, Great Herring Pond was shut down due to a cyanobacterial bloom. This harmful bacterium can cause illness in humans and can be deadly to dogs who go in the water, as well as birds and fish.

Herring Ponds Watershed Association (HPWA) sprinted into action, warning pond residents, placing large signs at beach and boat launch areas, and posting on social media. Don Williams, President of HPWA, asked residents for their support in getting the approval of town meeting for a long-overdue water quality plan. Residents responded with donations. Within weeks, HPWA had raised \$10,000 to add to the town's Environmental Affairs Fund to make the plan happen. The plan was approved at the fall town meeting.

Don Williams, President of HPWA said "I am grateful for two things: the generosity of our watershed constituents in contributing to HPWA's share of the Water Quality Plan; and the realization that Plymouth Town Meeting representatives understood that long-term, it was important for Plymouth to understand how to eliminate toxic cyanobacteria blooms in Plymouth's ponds."

According to Kim Tower, Environmental Technician for the Plymouth Department of Marine and Environmental Affairs, the purpose of the study is to determine where phosphorus and nitrogen are coming into the ponds, as well as what their loads are to the pond systems, in order to decide which course of mitigation will be best to improve the water quality.

For the past ten years, the town and HPWA have been sampling the water and have hypothesized that sediment on the bottom of the ponds was releasing a significant amount of phosphorus. The presence of too much phosphorus in the water can cause bacterial blooms such as the one on Great Herring and several other ponds last summer, as well as algae blooms.

Tower added that the Department tried unsuccessfully to get a grant for the plan over five years ago. Now, \$71,000 is being made available through the town's Environmental Affairs Fund, which comes from fees charged to companies that have solar fields in town. Money from this fund must go to projects such as water quality studies, sampling, river restoration and land acquisition. No funds for the Water Quality Plan will come from the Town's general fund.

The study will be conducted by the School of Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) and the TMBL Solutions Group. SMAST, which has worked with the town in the past, is honoring a seven-year-old quote for the study.

The Town is currently in the contracting phase of the project, and data provided by the Town and HPWA is being reviewed. New sampling of water and algae will start in April and continue monthly through October. Divers will take a sample 14 sediment cores in Little and Great Herring Ponds. Samples will be put under both high and low oxygen conditions. This will allow quantification of how much phosphorus is coming out of the sediment and into the pond water. Researchers will also look at the land surrounding the ponds and such factors as how close septic systems are to the pond. Then the data will be compiled and the

report created. Tower said that the reports will most likely be ready toward the end of 2021.

The goal is to identify the sources of the nutrients/pollutants, such as storm run-off, septic systems, fertilizers, atmospheric deposition, or even cranberry bogs. That knowledge will allow the HPWA and the Town to remediate the problem most effectively. For instance, seven years ago, an alum treatment was done on White island Pond, funded by a grant. The alum binds to the phosphorus in the sediment, keeping it from contaminating the water. There has been no cyanobacteria growth in the pond since then. This could be one possible option for Great Herring Pond.

Tower called this project a great collaboration effort with HPWA, including help with grant writing and conducting a lot of water sampling over the years. The donations raised by HPWA members and residents was important in getting approval through town meeting.

“Residents may see the School of Marine Science people out sampling this summer”, she added. “We will keep the Herring Ponds residents updated on the study’s progress through HPWA”.

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