

By John McKenna

MORRIS – The Bantam Lake Protective Association is petitioning the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to take on a greater financial role in an ongoing effort to improve water quality in the largest natural lake in the state.

Citing pollution, outbreaks of invasive weeds, and blooms of toxic blue-green algae in recent summers, the BLPA believes DEEP needs to begin doing its share of the work to enhance the health of the state-owned lake.

The BLPA petition was circulated during the organization's meeting Saturday at Town Hall. A standing-room-only crowd of more than 100 BLPA members and others packed a steamy basement meeting room in a show of support for the petition drive that by the end of the meeting had collected dozens of signatures.

“The petition will be presented to DEEP to get their attention and hopefully their funding and their help,” said Kathy Hill of Morris, a member of the BLPA board of directors.

DEEP, Hill said, has provided little in the way of assistance for the lake since buying the former Beverly's property in 2011 and creating a public boat launch. Prior to the purchase, DEEP issued a two-page draft outlining its plan to assist with the stewardship of the lake, committing to partnering with the BLPA on weed control, law enforcement and other issues.

“They made a commitment in several areas, and they haven't come through,” Hill said. “None of it has happened.”

BLPA President Connie Trolle of Morris explained a plan to treat the lake with aluminum sulfate, which would improve water quality dramatically for 10 to 15 years. The cost of the treatment, however, would be more than \$2 million, money the nonprofit organization that relies on donations doesn't have.

“We can treat the lake, we can improve water quality, but it's going to take a lot of money,” Trolle said, adding that financial assistance from the state would be appreciated.

The BLPA has been using its funding to treat the lake with copper sulfate in recent years, and while copper sulfate has worked to reduce algae, its effectiveness has diminished, according to the organization.

Aluminum sulfate, which is safe for human consumption and unlike copper sulfate is not toxic to plants, fish and other wildlife, is far more expensive than copper sulfate because it has to be used in greater amounts. The chemical controls algae by binding itself to phosphorous, the nutrient that feeds algae, and settling to the bottom of the lake, where it also prevents phosphorous from being released, explained BLPA consultant Dominic Meringola.

“Multiple weeks of treatment and hundreds of gallons of aluminum sulfate would be required,” Meringola said. “But it would really change the face of Bantam Lake’s water quality for years to come.”

The BLPA petition also asks DEEP to find a solution to the issue of nutrients from the Woodridge Lake sewer treatment plant in Goshen leaching into the northern reaches of the Bantam River, which flows into the lake. DEEP in 2021 issued a report showing that the obsolete sewer plant is the primary source of the nutrients that are contributing to frequent algae blooms in the lake.

The Woodridge Lake Sewer District, which has been under state order to upgrade its treatment plant since 1989, has been looking to send its sewage to an alternate location, the current favored one being Litchfield’s wastewater treatment facility.

“Woodridge Lake has been very cooperative and wants to fix this problem,” BLPA Treasurer Peter Longo of Morris said. “None of this will happen quickly. There are a lot of moving parts and we’re working them all.”

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