

LONG ISLAND

Coalition advocates for LI's water

BY EMILY C. DOOLEY
emily.dooley@newsday.com

A coalition of environmental groups yesterday outlined what they said local, county and state government officials must do to reverse the decline of Long Island's water quality.

The ideas range from adopting local zoning rules that consider water use and establishing water quality committees, to upgrading sewage treatment plants and providing financial incentives to foster clean water innovation.

"Right now we have to do something about our groundwater because of its impact on surface water and on drinking water," Long Island Pine Barrens Society executive director Dick Amper said at a news conference.

The Long Island Clean Water Partnership last week sent letters detailing water quality problems to all town supervisors, both county executives, all county legislators and the Long Island delegates in the Assembly

and State Senate.

The coalition has about 45 members and is led by Amper's group, Citizens Campaign for the Environment, Group for the East End and The Nature Conservancy of Long Island.

Among the challenges cited were an increase in harmful algal blooms and nitrogen levels, plus contamination from volatile organic chemicals, which threaten both surface water and the aquifers that are Long Island's sole source of water.

"We're not just seeking verbal support from our legislators. We're seeking legislative and policy support," said Citizen Campaign's executive director, Adrienne Esposito.

The partnership called on Suffolk County to release a final version of its Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan, which was issued in draft form in 2010 and confirmed a dramatic increase in nitrogen levels.

The county plans to meet with environmentalists next

month to talk about ways to respond to the report's findings, Suffolk Department of Health Services spokeswoman Grace Kelly-McGovern said.

In Nassau County, the partnership wants upgrades to the Bay Park Sewage Treatment Plant to include an outfall pipe that releases treated sewage into the Atlantic Ocean rather than Reynolds Channel. The county also needs to establish a water resources monitoring plan, the partnership said.

An outfall pipe is part of the upgrade plan for Bay Park, though funding is still being arranged and a water resources monitoring contract is being finalized, said Michael Martino, spokesman for the county Department of Public Works.

Towns should create water quality action plans and committees to assess water resources, the group said, and at the state level elected officials should establish a Long Island Water Pollution Control Act.