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EAST HAMPTON

Ocean may help clean pond

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East Hampton officials say more frequent flushing with salt water could be key to combating the toxic algal blooms appearing in Georgica Pond.

Town trustees typically hire a contractor to dig a connection between the pond and the ocean in the spring and fall, allowing fish to migrate and water to flow freely between the two bodies until sand naturally builds up and closes the opening.

But the reappearance of dangerous blue-green algae this year indicates more regular and longer flushing may be needed, said Kim Shaw, the town's director of natural resources.

The recommendation is one part of a plan East Hampton Town, East Hampton Village, the nine trustees and others drafted last month in response to recent blue-green algal blooms, which can be harmful to humans and animals who ingest the pond's water.

A Jack Russell terrier died two years ago after drinking from the pond during a blue-green algae bloom, spurring officials to monitor water quality more closely. The trustees earlier this summer warned people to be careful while swimming or wading in the pond, and

to avoid taking crabs or shellfish from it after scientists detected the algae again.

The ocean's salinity could help fight blue-green algae because the algae thrives in freshwater, Shaw said. Georgica Pond's water is considered brackish — a mixture of fresh and salt water.

The trustees could explore ways to keep the connection open longer and possibly open it in the winter, according to the plan.

"It's like a dam, it just bursts open," said Diane McNally, who leads the trustees. She said it costs about \$750 to hire a bulldozer operator to dig an opening to flush the pond.

The algal blooms are fed by nitrogen flowing from household septic systems and fertilized lawns in the pond's watershed, town officials and scientists say.

Town and village officials could explore upgrading septic systems and storm drains, regulating fertilizer use more closely and planting gardens that filter runoff before it reaches the pond, according to the draft.

Town Supervisor Larry Cantwell said the town board, village board and trustees should pass resolutions endorsing the plan. Shaw said she and other officials will meet with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation this month to discuss it.