

LONG ISLAND

Pollution check

■ **Policymakers tour**
nitrogen-tainted Forge River

■ **Cesspools and septic**
systems have been blamed

BY JENNIFER BARRIOS
jennifer.barrios@newsday.com

Policymakers and scientists went on a boat tour of the Forge River in Mastic yesterday morning, surveying the nitrogen-polluted waterway in advance of the governor's third public meeting on Long Island's water quality and storm protection.

Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone had targeted the Forge River as one of the areas in the county most in need of sewers.

The river has excessive nitrogen levels caused by surrounding cesspools and septic systems, resulting in a weakening of coastal marshes that are key in protecting communities from storm damage, experts have said.

"We've devastated our surface waters, as highlighted by the Forge River," Bellone said. "It's the greatest example of the damage that we've caused here, and it's our obligation to do everything we can to reverse it."

Bellone was joined by state Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Joseph Martens.

"Not too long ago, we



State DEC Commissioner Joseph Martens, second from left, Suffolk Executive Steve Bellone, center, and Stony Brook University marine and atmospheric services associate dean R. Lawrence Swanson.

thought places like the Forge River and the bays could handle unlimited amounts of nitrogen," Martens said. "We now know that's not true."

The group, including county legislators Kate Browning and Al Krupski and Brookhaven Town Supervisor Edward Romaine, split up to board three boats, which made their way down the river. At one point, they observed workers from the Suffolk County Department of Health taking oxygen measurements of the bottom of the river.

One reading came back at 2.9 parts per million. Below 3 parts per million is unsafe for aquatic life, said Walter Dawydiak, director of environmental quality with the Suffolk County Department of Health.

Bellone, Martens and several others later regrouped in Brentwood, where they held the

third of the governor's four planned meetings on Long Island's water and coastal resiliency, hearing presentations from experts and comments from the public.

During the fourth meeting, which has not been scheduled, policymakers will present a set of recommendations on how to improve Long Island's coastal resiliency and water infrastructure that will be sent to Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo.