

Cuomo plan includes \$6 million study for Long Island drinking water



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Gov. Andrew Cuomo

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By Joe Nikic

Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced a series of water quality initiatives Thursday, which includes a \$6 million study for the management of groundwater across Long Island and the creation of a statewide water quality response team.

“Every New Yorker has a fundamental right to clean and safe drinking water,” Cuomo said. “Water is a priceless resource that requires the highest levels of protection, and I am proud to continue this administration’s legacy of standing up for the environment. We are taking aggressive and proactive steps to ensure clean and healthy communities throughout the state — both for current residents and for generations to come.”

The announcement follows a proposal last week by state Sen. Jack Martins (R-Old Westbury) and state Assemblywoman Michelle Schimel (D-Port Washington) to include \$3.2 million in the next state budget to fund a study to map the flow of groundwater and determine where saltwater may be infiltrating Nassau County’s freshwater aquifers.

“Governor Cuomo’s announcement today calling for \$6 million in funding for an island-wide study, conducted by the (U.S. Geological Survey), would build upon the fundamentals of our original request and also provide those same benefits to Suffolk County as well,” Martins and Schimel said in a joint

statement Thursday. “We applaud the Governor’s actions and look forward to working with him on this issue. Drinking water is a necessity, not a luxury, and we will continue working to protect our water supply to ensure that it is safe and clean for generations to come.”

The groundwater study will examine where and how saltwater and other contaminants are mixing with both Nassau and Suffolk’s freshwater, according to Cuomo’s office.

The state will then use that information, his office said, to develop a “groundwater flow model” to better manage and understand groundwater impacts.

The water supply for Long Island’s more than 2.8 million people comes from underground aquifers — the upper glacial, the Lloyd, the Magothy and the Jameco, according to the USGS project proposal.

Research has shown the intrusion of salt water into the Lloyd and the Magothy aquifers poses a growing problem, the proposal says, and there is currently insufficient information about the flow of the groundwater and the freshwater-saltwater interface in the aquifers.

“Clean water is a fundamental right and I applaud Governor Cuomo for taking such bold action to ensure New York continues to lead the nation in providing access to safe, clean, drinkable water on Long Island,” Nassau County Executive Ed Mangano said in a statement. “Together, these new measures will ensure that New York’s water quality is not only exemplary, but the best in the nation.”

As part of the water quality initiatives, Cuomo created a statewide Water Quality Rapid Response Team to more quickly address drinking water contamination concerns.

The team, which will be co-chaired by state Department of Environmental Conservation Acting Commissioner Basil Seggos and state Department of Health Commissioner Howard Zucker, will work with the state’s municipalities and develop an action plan to get recommendations to strengthen the state’s drinking water, groundwater and surface water protection programs, Cuomo’s office said.

“Providing high quality drinking water is part of the foundation of protecting the public’s health,” Zucker said in a statement. “Governor Cuomo’s plan to improve the quality of water throughout the state is going to help protect the health and well-being of all New Yorkers by bringing the agencies together, examining the latest science and developing the best policies to safeguard our water supply.”

The water-quality team will also review standards for unregulated contaminants, public and private drinking water wells and drinking water treatment options.