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LI's water quality focus of task force

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ALBANY — Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo will announce a new task force today to tackle water quality issues on Long Island with the goal of coming up with recommendations in June to improve sewer management and protect groundwater.

In collaboration with Nassau and Suffolk county governments, the state will hold a series of public meetings beginning May 12 to hear from scientific and environmental experts about long-term pollution strategies. Controlling nitrogen will be a priority, the Cuomo administration said.

"We need innovative solutions for protecting and improving Long Island's water resources that will last for generations," Cuomo, who is up for re-election this fall, said in a statement. "Working with the community, environmental stakeholders and our local officials, we will identify the new challenges we face with increasing extreme weather events and examine the best advances for dealing with groundwater and surface water pollution."

Long Island leaders have focused on sewer, wastewa-

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ter treatment and nitrogen since superstorm Sandy struck. Among other problems, the storm knocked the massive Bay Park Sewage Treatment plant offline.

Nassau County has secured federal funding for upgrades at Bay Park and is attempting to garner more aid to create an ocean outfall pipe and a system to remove nitrogen from treated wastewater before it is dumped into the Atlantic Ocean.

Meanwhile, Suffolk has launched a campaign to clean up nitrogen-polluted waters, focusing on sewer and wastewater systems. The county also is working on a Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan. Officials have estimated that about 70 percent of homes in Suffolk County aren't served by sewers.

Southampton Town Super-

visor Anna Throne-Holst said in a statement that "water quality protection has emerged as the major environmental and economic challenge facing our region."

Republican Nassau County Executive Edward Mangano and Democrat Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone will work with the state on the water quality review.

Bellone said Cuomo's "plan to engage scientists, experts and the public to find solutions for Long Island's wastewater problems is a welcome partnership and complement to Suffolk County's efforts to reclaim our water."

The May 12 meeting will focus on Nassau, looking at wastewater infrastructure and the bay area north of Long Beach Island, Cuomo officials said.

A May 19 meeting is slated for Stony Brook University, featuring testimony from wastewater and septic system experts. A third meeting is set for May 28; state officials will tour Suffolk facilities and talk with local officials about high levels of nitrogen in the Great South Bay and other South Shore bays. The public will have an opportunity to submit comments at this meeting.