



Flounder Are Vanishing

Napeague data may solve mystery, aid restoration

By [Christopher Walsh](#) | April 28, 2016 - 2:05pm

With winter flounder said to be almost nonexistent, Anne McElroy of Stony Brook University's School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences asked the East Hampton Town Trustees at a meeting on Monday to endorse the collection of data this summer in Napeague Harbor to find out why.

Ms. McElroy said not only were recreational landings of adult winter flounder in New York's inland waters almost nonexistent but mortality for juveniles appears higher in Long Island waters than elsewhere. The study being planned would be funded by the National Marine Fisheries Service and include a random survey of waterways from Napeague to Jamaica Bay. The goal, she said, is to incrementally rebuild the stocks.

Genetic studies in 2010 and 2011 had found that winter flounder in Long Island waters come from a very small parental stock, she said. As few as 1,200 fish contributed to the individuals at six study sites across the island, with fewer than 200 contributing in some bays. "This was very troubling. The more diversity in the gene pool, the more ability to respond to changes in the environment," she said.

The Stony Brook team is to count and measure all winter flounder to estimate mortality and to take samples from up to 50 fish to assess responses to stress, among other factors affecting the fishery. A caging study in three areas of Shinnecock Bay will collect up to 450 additional fish in an effort to determine optimum locations for caged fish, an effort to shield juveniles from predators. Mortality rates in and outside the cages will be measured, along with dissolved oxygen, salinity, and temperature.

The study would provide data that would support a larger restoration effort, Dr. McElroy said, while the caging effort would provide direct evidence on the potential to enhance stocks by excluding predators.

The reaction of the trustees to the project was muted. Pat Mansir said the potential impact of trawling in Napeague Harbor was worrisome, while Rick Drew said Napeague was "one of our last eelgrass sites in East Hampton, so be really careful trawling around." Francis Bock, the

trustees' clerk, said he would put Dr. McElroy in touch with John Dunne, director of the town's shellfish hatchery, who could advise her what areas to avoid.

Diane McNally said that, while she would support the project, "You already have the data. Jump in there, get the cages in Shinnecock, and see if you can grow some fish. I'm very concerned about 'data to support restoration efforts.' I would like to hear 'stock enhancement.' "

"Restoration is the end game," Mr. Drew agreed. "The less time between now and some form of restocking program is the greater interest to the community on Long Island."

In other news, Simon Kinsella of the Wainscott Citizens Advisory Committee asked the trustees to include Wainscott Pond in the monitoring program led by Christopher Gobler, also of Stony Brook University's School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences. Dr. Gobler has been studying waterways under trustee jurisdiction since 2013, and presented a summary of his 2015 findings last week. Mr. Kinsella said the summary was "fascinating, also disturbing."

Surrounded by residential properties, with no public access, Wainscott Pond doesn't have "the potential for some of those toxins to get into the food chain, but I still think there is an important reason to look at it," Mr. Kinsella said.

"We can look at getting standard testing undertaken," but "anything above and beyond" that would require community involvement, Mr. Drew said. He noted that the Friends of Georgica Pond Foundation, a group formed by shorefront property owners, is developing multiple efforts to fight pollution.

Sara Davison, the group's executive director, asked the trustees to approve the use of an aquatic weed harvester on Georgica Pond to remove macro-algae to determine whether harvesting macro-algae would be an effective means of removing nitrogen and phosphorous, which is blamed for the cyanobacteria blooms that have led to crabbing being banned in the pond for much of the last two summers.

The weed harvester could arrive as soon as next week, but its use is also pending a State Department of Environmental Conservation permit. The harvester is propelled by paddlewheels, moves very slowly, and would not create a wake, she said, and the Georgica Association has approved its launch from an area at Eel Cove.

Ms. Davison said a permeable reactive barrier, which intercepts nitrogen, would be installed at the north end of the pond and other sites are to be identified. Discussions also have started on the feasibility of fine-sediment dredging to remove phosphorous from the pond. In addition, she said, a number of pondfront property owners have agreed to install state-of-the-art septic systems, which would remove most nitrogen, upon approval from the Suffolk Department of Health Services, and the foundation is promoting pesticide-free landscaping and reduced fertilizer use.