

OUR TOWNS

YAPHANK

Dredging of lake postponed again

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Plans to dredge a Yaphank lake infested with invasive plants have been postponed for the second time due to more than \$3 million in cost overruns, Brookhaven Town officials said yesterday.

The town had planned to dredge Lower Lake this spring after postponing the project last year because of excessive turbidity, or cloudy water, during the dredging of nearby Upper Lake.

The delay caused the project's

estimated cost to grow to \$8.7 million, \$3.7 million more than the town had budgeted to dredge both lakes. Town officials said yesterday they hoped to dredge Lower Lake next year.

"I'm very supportive of the dredging and cleaning of Lower Lake," Supervisor Edward P. Romaine said. "However, the cost overruns were far greater than was anticipated."

Upper and Lower lakes, a pair of man-made millponds, had become infested with non-native cabomba and variable leaf milfoil, which harmed na-

tive species and left the lakes unsuitable for fishing and boating for years. The invasive plants also stymied crews hired to clean Upper Lake, causing town officials to scrap plans to dredge Lower Lake last year.

Councilwoman Connie Keper, whose district includes the lakes, said she has asked engineers to seek other methods of cleaning Lower Lake. She also is seeking state and federal funding. "Obviously, we're still committed to the project," she said. "It's just that we've hit a snafu in terms of finishing it."

Adrienne Esposito, executive director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment, a state-wide advocacy group with an office in Farmingdale, said the postponements could cause irreparable harm to the lakes.

"All that leads to the slow death of the ecosystem," said Esposito, who served on a town committee studying ways to save the lakes. "That lake is slowly dying. Every year we wait, there's consequences."

In an email, state Department of Environmental Conservation spokesman Bill Fonda said the

delay "will not cause any environmental damage and may have some specific benefits," such as giving the town time to "assess the results of the Upper Lake dredging project to determine if the goals of the project were realized."

Yaphank resident Johan McConnell said the latest delay is disappointing.

"Now to hear that there's another setback, I would think that the community is going to be very, very upset about this," she said. "It just allows the invasive species to get a stronger hold."