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News

## Combined Sewer Overflow Long Term Control Plan: Bacteria down, price tag could rise

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TROY — There was good news and bad news at the project recap meeting for the Combined Sewer Overflow Long Term Control Plan.

The good news is that the 2009 tributary samples to the Hudson River showed a decrease in bacteria contamination and the Long Term Control Plan draft is on track to be submitted by the Capital District Regional Planning Commission in June.

But the bad news is that an estimated price tag for the total mitigation of the aging sewer systems is still up in the air and will likely cost millions.

By disinfecting the water and sewage going through the sewer treatment plants, the number of dry months with levels above compliance will decrease from 30 months to two months, explained Deb Shannon, a senior planner with the Capital District Regional Planning Commission.

Along with this, in a 2009 study to follow up obtained 2008 figures, the bacteria in tributaries to the Hudson have come down a lot, like the Patroon Creek, which Shannon attributed to extra work being done by the surrounding municipalities like Albany.

Even though figures have dropped, some tributaries are still not compliant in dry months and none of them are compliant to state fecal coliform standards in the wet months, explained Shannon.

The studies and preliminary work alone has totaled about \$5.3 million. All of this will go toward a recommended plan to the state's Department of Environmental Conservation which was scheduled to be submitted in September but an extension was granted in order to obtain more information.

"We wanted models that were fully supported," explained Shannon. "It was delayed for the better."

Along with federal and state grants, the communities divided the costs of creating the Long Term Control Plan.

The bacteria levels were a result of sewer overflow into the river and creeks from the outdated infrastructure in Troy, Watervliet, Cohoes, Albany, Rensselaer, and Green Island which all installed their sewer systems before World War II and with a system design that combines sanitary wastewater and stormwater runoff.

With the system, when wastewater treatment plants reach treatment capacity during rainstorms, the sewer system

discharges untreated sewage directly into the river which is called Combined Sewer Overflow.

The six communities have shared the costs of the study and have been working together since about 2003. The federal Environmental Protection Agency adopted a CSO policy with the Clean Water Act in 1994 which required municipalities with such sewer systems to prepare and implement a Long Term Control Plan.

"The project has taken a while," commented Neil Bonesteel, Troy's chief water plant operator. "It has been quite a process to get to this point and we are closing in on the end point for the Long Term Control Plan."

He said after the draft proposal is submitted to the DEC there will be negotiating with the state on the project. In other similar projects across the country, the price tag has been about \$1 billion in Hartford, Conn. and \$1 billion in Indianapolis, Ind.

"With the plan, we hope it will not be as expensive here," Bonesteel said.

Thursday night's forum was the third public meeting on the topic. About 35 people attended.

Over the past year, the communities and the sewer districts have modeled the Hudson River bacteria and other parameters using sampling data collected in 2008 and 2009 with the four Combined Sewer System models. The Hudson River model has been used to run several water quality scenarios including adding disinfection at the wastewater treatment facilities and capturing 85 percent of combined sewer overflows. The results of these model runs will determine the types of control measures that will be necessary to reach water quality standards.

Work is now under way to evaluate control alternatives and associated costs, officials said.

"It will be a huge improvement when the sewer treatment plants are disinfecting," said Sean Ward, executive assistant to the mayor in Green Island. "All the communities have made adjustments for the good of the environment."

Ward said disinfecting at the Albany Sewer Treatment plant would be about \$9 million.

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