WEST MILFORD

Township to reveal wastewater plan

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The Environmental Commission is hosting a special presentation on Monday when it will reveal a grant-funded management plan for on-site wastewater treatment systems in the community's Greenwood Lake watershed.

The meeting, scheduled for 7 p.m. on Jan. 9, will feature grant consultant Fred Lubnow of Princeton Hydro, who developed the On-Site Wastewater Treatment Prioritization Plan for West Milford with the assistance of $108,217 in federal grant money allocated by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Division of Watershed Management from the federal 604(b) grant program. That program was designed to fund studies needed to "determine the nature, extent, and causes of water quality problems, and to establish point and nonpoint source pollution controls neces-

sary to solve those problems," according to DEP documents.

Greenwood Lake's problem is a relatively high concentration of phosphorous, which has caused the 1,884-acre bi-state lake to be designated as an impaired body of water by the 2004 New York State Clean Water Act. To lose that label, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation recommended that the lake cut its annual phosphorous load originating from septic systems by 43 percent from 710 kilograms a year to 401.

The management plan was created to assess the connections between traditional onsite wastewater-treatment systems, land characteristics, and the infiltration of phosphorous into the lake in an effort to highlight the benefits of maintaining traditional septic systems, replacing aging ones, and prioritizing waste- and stormwater-treatment projects based on objective data.

To achieve that goal, Lubnow developed a GIS-assisted database

for the area's septic systems, cataloging, mapping, and categorizing all the systems within 330 feet of the lake and its tributaries in an effort to identify the more environmentally sensitive and vulnerable areas. Criteria such as age, location, soil type, and slope as well as the depth to bedrock and groundwater were recorded, as these factors play an integral role in the functionality of a system and the migration of phosphorous into bodies of water, he said.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 20 percent of both on-site and clustered wastewater treatment systems are "malfunctioning to some degree" and increasing "various pollutants, including pathogens such as fecal coliform in both surface and ground waters."

In 1981, phosphorous from septic systems was reported at 30 percent of the total phosphorous load originating from the New Jersey watershed. More recent estimations have elevated that number to 50 percent. Lubnow has attributed this increase to the increasing age, quantity, and density of the approximately 8,500 septic systems in West Milford – around 3,300 of which are within 300 feet of major bodies of water, not including streams and wet-

lands, according to former Municipal Health Officer William Wallace. Those systems, Wallace said, collect around 660,000 gallons of wastewater a day.

To prevent that wastewater from filling the lake with phosphorous, other unwanted nutrients, and other pollutants like fecal coliform, commissioners have said the continued maintenance of septic systems through municipal-ordinance mandated cleanings and inspections every three years is the most vital.

The plan, which will be submitted to the DEP as a proposed amendment to the Northeast Areawide Water Quality Management Plan and to develop a best management practices manual for onsite wastewater treatment systems, will include that recommendation as well as other preventative actions.

Updating plumbing, faucets, and fixtures, including removing garbage disposals, as well as using rain barrels to prevent saturated, low-oxygen soils from releasing phosphorous into ground water are additional steps that could be taken and possibly incentivized with future grant funding, Lubnow said.

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