

HARWICH — Town officials are seeking \$550,000 for alum treatments designed to prevent algae blooms in Hinckley's Pond, and they're hoping the community preservation committee will provide the funds. Town Administrator Christopher Clark said he's hopeful that the committee will endorse the request. Two years ago, citing concerns that the pond has no real public access, the committee voted 5-2 not to support a similar application for Hinckley's Pond.

"There was a concern that was raised that, well, we're only cleaning the ponds for the residents who live directly around it," he said.

Answering that concern, this year's proposal also includes \$50,000 to improve a small parcel of town-owned land on Pleasant Lake Avenue for new public access, Clark said. The land in question borders Hinckley's Pond and the Cape Cod Rail Trail and was formerly a parking area for the bike path. Located across the road from the Pleasant Lake General Store, the parking area was closed to vehicles several years ago because of traffic safety concerns.

Clark said he walked the site recently with Conservation Agent Amy Usowski and agrees that poor sight lines make it unwise to allow vehicle parking there. But the space would be ideal for bike racks and picnic tables, using the existing paved area as a scenic overview, possibly trimming some of the vegetation to open a vista of the pond.

Clark said town officials are investigating the possibility of providing a trail down the steep embankment that would allow people to reach the pond.

"It's a very tough site to get good public access," Clark noted. Another option might be the installation of a handicap-accessible viewing platform overlooking the water.

At its core, the project is about water quality, however. Using alum to treat Hinckley's Pond is a recommendation of the town's comprehensive wastewater management plan. Accumulations of phosphorus both in the water and in the sediments at the bottom of the pond periodically cause algae blooms, some of which have included toxic cyanobacteria, which can sicken animals and people.

A number of years ago, a blue-green algae bloom in the pond was so severe that the health department posted pond closure signs and warned residents against swimming or boating in the water, or allowing dogs to swim there. In 2012, CDM Smith, Inc., the town's wastewater consultant, recommended steps to reduce phosphorous concentrations in the pond by one-third. Because other funding sources are limited, the report recommended using CPA monies for the job. The document, now more than four years old, estimated that the alum treatment alone would cost \$550,000.

At first blush, it might seem that the project is ill-suited for the Community Preservation Act, which provides grants for projects in the specific areas of historic preservation, affordable housing, and recreation and open space, funded through a 3 percent property tax surcharge. The project application seeks funding under the historic preservation and recreation categories.

Clark said Hinckley's Pond is an important historical resource because it is part of a herring run, linking the Herring River with Seymour Pond and Long Pond beyond that. Traditionally, herring were harvested both for food and for bait for commercial fishermen, though the practice has since been suspended to help the herring population recover.

Further, Clark argued, Hinckley's Pond is an important recreational resource because it provides fishing, boating and swimming opportunities, albeit mostly for people who own property around the 174-acre kettle pond.

Though the community preservation committee expressed concerns two years ago, Clark said it is now well established that CPA monies can be used for treating ponds with alum. In May 2013, Eastham voters authorized \$220,000 for a treatment of Great Pond, he noted. The town did so under the "open space" provision of the act.

Clark presented the application to the community preservation committee on Oct. 27, and said the committee had a mixed opinion of the idea. Speaking at Monday's meeting of the board of selectmen, Community Preservation Committee Chairman Bob MacCready said public access to the pond remains a concern.

"That's going to continue to be one of the issues with that application," he said.

The community preservation committee will consider this year's applications in January. If it endorses the alum project, and then town meeting voters approve it in the spring, the alum treatment could begin shortly after July 1.

The CDM Smith report cautioned that, in order for the alum treatment to have lasting benefits, steps need to be taken to reduce the future phosphorus load entering the pond. Most of the phosphorus entering the

pond comes upstream from Seymour Pond and Long Pond, and from stormwater run-off and cranberry bogs.