

Spring Brook mulls wetland

Project would help operation meet wastewater discharge rules

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- STAFF WRITER BY KYLE WIND

SPRING BROOK TWP. — The sewer authority may enlist the aid of plants to help the operation meet more stringent wastewater discharge rules.

The board is exploring a floating wetland that would cost nearly \$700,000 less than the original plan to send effluent to a tank containing bacteria colonies that break down ammonia and nitrogen to meet new state Department of Environmental Protection standards.

“The wetland islands will float on the lagoon(s) surface, with natural vegetation mimicking what occurs naturally in healthy wetlands,” authority Chairman James Powell told DEP in a recent letter. “Plant roots submerged in the lagoon(s) will allow the plant life to utilize the existing nutrients as well as providing a large amount of surface area for aerobic and anaerobic bacteria to colonize.”

The project would cost about \$305,000 compared to an expected price tag of \$986,081 for the original plan.

Either way, the sewer authority needs help, as the small operation had \$7,900 in its bank account Friday afternoon.

The authority applied for a \$259,250 state Growing Greener grant but didn’t get state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources funding on its first try, despite the urgency officials expressed.

“Ours is a small authority, and the cost of the required upgrades to our plant will be financially devastating to us and our sanitary sewer users,” wrote David Caswell, vice chairman of the authority, in the grant application.

Spring Brook Twp. residents connected to the sewer system pay \$540 per year, while Roaring Brook Twp. residents pay \$960 annually.

Now, the plan is to apply for the next round of gaming grants, but the authority is exploring other approaches in the interim, said Cheryl Bosley, authority secretary.

The floating wetland approach is modeled after a system the Wiconisco Twp. treatment plant used in the Harrisburg area, explained engineer Mary Lou Butler. She

was still researching whether the winter climate in Lackawanna County would work for the foliage.

The authority heard a presentation from Nelson Environmental Inc., who proposed the board consider an aeration process involving a clean stone bed and a layer of insulating mulch that allows the system to treat nearfreezing wastewater.

The preliminary estimate on the cost of that approach is about \$500,000. Contact the writer: kwind@timeshamrock.com, @kwindTT on Twitter