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# Parker's River fish kill raises concerns

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By [Jen Ouellette](#)  
 The Register  
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YARMOUTH — The sight of dead fish in and around Parker's River in West Yarmouth Sunday has called attention to the problem of nutrient loading in Cape waterways.

The fish kill may have occurred after recent heavy rains contributed to road runoff into the pond, adding to the nitrogen entering the water body and helping to create and feed algae blooms.

"When you have a fish kill it really underscores this dramatic effect that creeping pollution can have on a water body," said Susan Nickerson, executive director of the Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fisherman's Association.

Nickerson said septic pollution, fertilizer and storm water runoff all contributed to the ailing health of many of the Cape's ponds and inlets.

"The take-home message from my point of view is these episodes are dramatic indicators of the problem and should really be the drivers in terms of solutions, figuring out what the solutions need to be and then moving toward them," Nickerson said.

On Monday, many in Yarmouth were discussing the issue, including the board of health.

"I went down to the bridge this morning at 8 myself and there were a whole variety of fish dead at the bottom," said Brian Braginton-Smith, board of health member and executive director of the Lewis Bay Research Center.

"If the weather pattern continues and the algae blooms continue we could see additional die-off," added Yarmouth Health Director Bruce Murphy, who said the area is challenged with a lack of flushing.

"The aerator can't keep up and put enough oxygen back into the water," he said.

Murphy said the town is looking at widening the bridge over Route 28, which might allow for more flushing, but officials have to be careful that wouldn't cause flooding or other problems in nearby homes or businesses.

"The town has been very proactive in the sense of pulling the road runoff out of Parker's River and Swan Pond. We are moving forward with the wastewater management and sewer program and we are monitoring the water quality and have an aerator, but with all the development up and around the pond and along the river that leads to lots of nitrogen and Title 5 doesn't address those issues," said Yarmouth Natural Resources Director Karl von Hone, who said Monday testing confirmed low oxygen levels.

"We do have some low dissolved oxygen, which is expected with the large algae blooms and all the rain we've had," said von Hone, adding the town will continue to monitor the oxygen levels.

"We monitor it. There's not really much that can be done. We do have a wind-powered aerator and we are checking to make sure that is working, but when you have these large algae blooms, nature must take its course," said von

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"I think the big picture thought is that there is a critical link between marine habitat and our fisheries and this is a stark example of that impact," said Nickerson, adding that some of the fish reported to her as dead are commercially harvested.

"As the marine environment gets degraded there is a distinct impact on fisheries," she added.

"It's not all about sewerage as that's not the only source. It's the biggest source but there are other contributors as well that can be addressed," said Nickerson.

Among the options she recommended to help treat the problem were dredging of channels, public education and outreach and rebuilding or seeking alternate routes for outfall pipes.

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