

Block Island and Green Hill Pond Onsite Wastewater Demonstration Project

Factsheet August 2005

Overview: The towns of New Shoreham, Charlestown and South Kingstown in conjunction with the University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension embarked on a 4 year project (extended to 5 years) funded by an EPA Demonstration grant to develop wastewater management programs in sensitive areas of these coastal towns. Management was expanded town-wide and the project demonstrates effective management methods, ordinance requirements, and pros/cons of advanced treatment systems. Lessons learned from this project will serve as a model for communities starting up wastewater management programs, throughout the country.

Project Goal: To establish sustainable, onsite wastewater management programs for Block Island and the Green Hill Pond Watershed. To promote the use of advanced systems through demonstration system installations, monitoring, training and the development of requirements for these systems based on proximity to sensitive resources, soil types, and high water tables, as well as management methods.

Reasons for Action: Failing septic systems have produced localized threats to Block Island's sole source aquifer and surface water reservoirs. Block Island aimed to protect the existing water quality of its drinking water and coastal waters through participation in this project. Portions of Green Hill Pond have been closed to shell fishing since 1993 and cesspools and failing septic systems are the likely cause of elevated bacteria levels there and in private wells. In both locations, nitrogen from septic systems is a concern for drinking water quality and the fertilization of coastal waters. Furthermore, development pressures on Block Island and in the Green Hill Pond watershed continue to threaten the already stressed resources.

Results: New Shoreham, Charlestown and South Kingstown all have wastewater ordinances, town-wide wastewater management programs, and qualified employees/wastewater programs, incorporated into the overall Town budgets. All three towns have 2% loans available for septic system repairs and replacement. Block Island has enacted performance standards and requires advanced systems in critical areas. All three towns are phasing out cesspools and two have web based tracking programs. 24 demonstration systems were installed and monitored through this project. URI has trained 784 people in system installation, led 190 on field tours of demonstration systems, and trained 256 in system maintenance through the OWTC.

Looking To The Future: Charlestown and South Kingstown will enact performance standards and require advanced treatment systems for critical areas. Part-time staff positions may be expanded to full-time positions. Cesspools will be eliminated in all Towns by 2014. The water quality will be preserved for future generations.

SMALL MAP of GH1P watershed and BI