

# HAP study eyes growth through water conservation

By Kevin Shalvey

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North Kingstown, the Kent County Water Authority and the Quonset Business Park all draw water from the watershed that includes the Hunt, Annaquatucket and Pettaquamscutt rivers. With 5.2 million gallons being siphoned daily from the watershed, it's one of the most in-demand in the state.

That's why, in 2006, when Amgen announced it was set to almost double its daily water use to 800,000 gallons, a battle between the company and the Kent County Water Authority erupted. That eventually led to state legislation that guaranteed Amgen would have its water, and demand on the watershed increased.

Now, the area will serve as the testing ground for the R.I. Water Resources Board's multiyear study of effective methods for water conservation and how they can create economic growth. The HAP Pilot Study, named for the three rivers, started with meetings in March and organizers are now putting funding in place.

Back in 2006, the three HAP-area water suppliers "were not communicating with each other and that caused that waterway to nearly run dry because of the over-withdrawal," said Coalition for Water Security Director Sheila Dormody, a member of the WRB. "Obviously, as environmentalists, we are very concerned about that kind of process that allows a river to run dry without any sort of consideration as to what the impact might be."

Along with looking at environmental concerns, the study will also explore the potential impacts that the region's water supply can have on business, Grow Smart Rhode Island Executive Director Scott Wolf said last week. His advocacy group is a member of the Coalition for Water Security.

"We think it is an economic-development issue," Wolf said. "The state has ambitious plans for Quonset Point and Davisville, in terms of additional job growth."

The Quonset Development Corporation, which oversees Quonset Business Park and the Port of Davisville, supplies water to about 8,000 people in the park. It has three wells in the HAP area, according to the Water Resources Board.

In e-mailed remarks, QDC Managing Director Steven J. King said his group is cooperating with the Water Resources Board during the study and "looks forward to implementation of any effort that will improve conservation."

King continued, "Water availability is clearly something that needs all of our [attention] and it's something that needs to be looked at in the near term. If something is not done to constrain the usage outside of the park, it could become an issue."

The area's water resources should be prioritized to foster growth, including planned developments along Post Road in North Kingstown, Wolf said. "We're inadvertently putting the health of our lawns above the health of our economy" by over-watering lawns in the HAP region, he said. The HAP study organizers estimate that 76 percent of household water use during the summer is used for lawn watering.

"We've been squandering what should be a competitive advantage for the state," Wolf said. "We are a wet state. We get a good amount of rain and snow every year."

The HAP study will test the efficiency of "several water-conservation strategies," Dormody said. The process for doing that is still being defined, but ideas include "restricting lawn watering to once or twice per week or considering pricing structures," she said. "And another important component will be the installation of meters that can measure the results and how much water is being used."

Because they can be read remotely, those meters will offer better data than the quarterly readings done by North Kingstown, said Coalition for Water Security Policy Director Harold Ward, a Water Resources Board member. He said that about 20 percent of the town now has the new meters. Stimulus funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which includes an investment in water conservation, could help pay for more meters, Dormody added.

Ward said the HAP study is being funded by the Water Resources Board, which has allocated an initial \$50,000 for the study. The study will take at least two years, with water-use data collected this summer serving as a baseline.

Ward said the study should result in local ordinances that could then be transferred to other municipalities.

"The whole idea is that there will eventually be a statewide set of limits on use and statewide approach to allocation," Ward said. "But to try that on a state level without having done that anywhere seemed too difficult."

The intent is to create better management of the state's water supply based on research, Dormody said.

"And, obviously, in a natural system, passing laws doesn't make water appear or available for industrial processes," she said. "It was clear [during the Amgen debate] that we needed some type of better water-management system for the state if we wanted to make sure we were planning ahead for opportunities that are available economically, to bring industry into the state while also protecting the natural resources." •

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