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Sucker Pond plan poor use of resources?

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BENNINGTON — An environmental organization has questioned whether a state plan to improve the area around Sucker Pond is a prudent use of public resources.

Meanwhile, state officials said the project is an important first step in preserving the area for multiple uses.

The Center for Biological Diversity, a national not-for-profit with an office in Richmond, suggested that further steps should be taken to ensure that the work lasts.

Conservation Advocate Mollie Matteson wrote that past projects in the area have been destroyed soon after their completion in a May 1 letter to the Green Mountain National Forest's Manchester District office. "Thus, while (the center) is supportive of any effort to protect habitat, water and soils of the area," she wrote, "I have a large degree of skepticism that this effort will be any more effective than the previous one, and I question the use of public resources for a probably futile venture."

On Wednesday, Matteson said she is not against the project but believes more analysis needs to be done to see if it's the most effective way to proceed and more monitoring and education is needed in the future.

The Agency of Natural Resources plans to restore the area over three days in June. ANR Watershed Coordinator Josh

Gorman said the project would restore vegetation, which has been damaged by ATVs and off-road vehicles. He said the planting would improve the pond's water quality.

The project would also create a formal access point to the pond.

Gorman said the state is still seeking approval from the Bennington Select Board and a site visit is scheduled for Friday. The town owns the area 300 feet from the pond, formerly Lake Hancock, located in Stamford, because it used to provide the town's drinking water. He said he was hoping to receive town approval in the near future.

Gorman said he understands Matteson's concerns but believes the project will be a success.

Forestry technician Richard Gaiotti, with the Green Mountain National Forest, agreed with Gorman. He said the land in question is a relatively new acquisition and the project would serve as an important first step in ongoing preservation efforts.

He said he does not expect 100 percent compliance but still believes the project can have an impact without it.

Gorman said in addition to the planting, access to the shoreline would be removed by placing a large boulder at the top of the project site, all trash would be removed and a sign would be erected to inform visitors about the project and its goals.

The project, estimated at around \$5,000, would be funded by grant money through the Vermont Clean and Clear program and the Green Mountain National Forest. Gaiotti said the U.S. Forest Service is awaiting input from the public and specialists before moving forward.

Matteson said a past project, completed a few years ago in the same location, was ineffective. After a site visit and conversations, she said "ATVs and other off-road recreationists had recklessly and irresponsibly created the multiple routes, muddy ruts, disturbed and denuded ground and trash piles that has been problematic in this part of the (forest) for a long time."

Officials with the Green Mountain National Forest, the Bennington County Conservation District, the Bennington Trail Conservancy, students in the Southwest Vermont Career Development Center's forestry class and camp owners would participate in the project.

The Center for Biological Diversity's mission is to protect and restore biodiversity for the sake of nature and people.

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