

South Bethany starts water diffusers

Written by Jon Bleiweis Staff Writer
May. 09

delmarvanow.com

SOUTH BETHANY — Work has begun on a project that may improve the quality of water in the town's canals.

The town partnered with Milton-based Envirotech Environmental Consulting to install a set of six diffusers within the first 1,100 feet of the Petherton Canal closest to Route 1.

Town councilman George Junkin, who chairs the town's Water Quality Committee, said the goal of the project is to increase the amount of dissolved oxygen in the canal so that fish can survive.

"In the summer, at the dead ends particularly, the water quality is very poor," he said. "The farther you get from the Little Assawoman Bay, the worse off we are. There's no circulation there."

The diffusers will be connected to a compressor, which he hopes will allow for more oxygen circulation within the canal.

Wes Allen, director of operations for Envirotech, said the project will give the town data to show what happens when the diffusers add more oxygen to the water column. He said potential benefits include better nutrient reduction, more bacteria to break down nutrients and a smaller likelihood of fish kills.

"Hopefully it will have a beneficial effect," he said.

The company previously put in three sets of six diffusers in Rehoboth Beach's Lake Gerar more than seven years ago, he said, adding there has not been a fish kill in that lake — one that was previously notoriously known for fish kills — since.

Junkin said South Bethany has monitored water quality levels in the canals since 2005. At the dead end of the canals, Junkin said the dissolved oxygen is generally two parts per million lower than at the other end, 1,600 feet away.

In the summer, that figure at the dead end is almost always below four parts per million, he said, which is the stress level for fish.

"The fish don't like to come if it's less," he said. "We've had it at zero at the end on bad days."

While the town is authorized to run the diffusers for two years, Junkin anticipates seeing results earlier.

"I suspect we will know within a few months because the summer time is the worst time," he said. "We'll know pretty much by the end of this summer whether they're doing it."

Should the results be favorable, Junkin said the town will consider using the diffuser system in the town's other canals.

The town allocated \$23,300 in its 2013 budget for the project.