

EDITORIAL

State must land \$550M for pipe

Destroyed by sewage, western bays need restoration, even if feds won't pay

New York is going fishing again. State officials are trawling Washington, D.C. And their target is a whopper: \$550 million in federal funding for an ocean outfall pipe for the Bay Park sewage treatment plant.

Now, we love a good fish story as much as anyone. And we dearly hope this one has a happy ending, because the pipe is a necessity for the health and protection of Nassau County's South Shore. But state officials have been on this Ahab-like quest for some time now, and they've been told several times in no uncertain terms that the project is not eligible for the funding they seek. If this month's expedition to the nation's capital leaves them with another empty hook, which seems likely, it's high time to shift gears and start making realistic plans to find the money elsewhere for this hugely important project.

This tale begins with superstorm Sandy, which crippled the Bay Park plant. The Federal Emergency Management Agency has awarded \$810 million to rebuild the plant — a kind of Sandy silver lining given Nassau's financial woes and Bay Park's decrepit condition even before Sandy struck. Complicating matters is the fact that the plant has been out of compliance with clean water regulations for years; the nitrogen-laced effluent it dumps into Reynolds Channel has dramatically degraded the western bays ecosystem and destroyed its coastal marshlands, a critical defense against the kind of storm surges and flooding seen with Sandy.

The solution offered by the state and county is to install a nitrogen-removal system and build a pipe that would carry the effluent out into the Atlantic, instead of the bays. That's the right call. But who should foot the \$700-million cost.



DOUG KUNTZ

In late 2012, partly treated sewage pours into Reynolds Channel.

After some silly gamesmanship, the state has agreed to use \$150 million in storm recovery money from the Department of Housing and Urban Development for the nitrogen-removal system. Now it wants FEMA to give the other \$550 million. But state officials have been rebuffed by FEMA several times. Federal officials advocating for New York, including Sen. Charles Schumer, who has led the fight for federal funding for Sandy damages, also have been turned down. FEMA says its regulations — which generally call for repairing existing things damaged by storms — simply do not allow for the construction of the ocean outfall pipe, which never existed.

Now, we understand this is Washington, where anything is possible. And we hope state officials can work a miracle. But if their entreaties are rejected again, they need to come up with alternative financing.

Fortunately, building the pipe is a multiyear project; the money does not have to be raised all at once. And it can come from many pots. Nassau must contribute — it was county inaction that led to Bay Park's noncompliance, after all. Potential state sources include bank settlement money, the Environmental Protection Fund and clean water funds from the Environmental Facilities Corp., as well as HUD storm recovery money.

No more delays. Long Island needs this pipe, not another fish story. **N**

CORRECTION: State Assemb. Dean Murray (R-East Patchogue) supports full disclosure of all outside income by state legislators. His position was stated incorrectly in a graphic that accompanied an editorial on Sunday.