

JUL 10 2003

New England Newsclip
AGENCY, INC.

348

72 WASHINGTON ST. (Rte. 53)
8 FRANKLIN STREET, QUINCY**EDITORIAL**

Water worries

1934

Water is something most of us don't think much about. We turn on the faucet and we expect it will flow. We hardly consider where our water comes from and rarely wonder if the supply is dwindling.

In the summer, when use increases as we water our lawns, wash our cars and fill the backyard swimming pool, restrictions and bans catch our attention. But when the restriction signs come down and our short summer slips into fall, our brief focus on conservation goes down the drain.

But for town officials, planners and developers, waning water supplies on the South Shore and elsewhere are a growing concern.

In Scituate, a recent study by the environmental planning group Comprehensive Environmental Incorporated (CEI) put the spotlight on some serious water worries for the community. The report, commissioned by the town, showed Scituate is very quickly approaching its daily water withdrawal limit set by the state Department of Environmental Protection.

CEI's report showed Scituate residents and businesses currently use 1.68 million gallons of water per day. The DEP limit for the town is 1.73 million gallons per day. At that rate of water use, Scituate would go over its limit with the construction of just 237 more residential or commercial units.

Town Planner Laura Harbottle estimates as many as 300 new housing units are in the planning stages in Scituate, and nearly half of them have already been approved. Some of the proposals involve high-density Chapter 40B developments involving a large number of units in a relatively small area, others include large buildings with multiple condominium units. All of them, when built and occupied will house more residents — putting a greater demand on what is becoming a limited water supply in town.

CEI suggests the town dredge its two main water sources, the reservoir across from Tack Factory Pond on Route 3A and Old Oaken Bucket Pond in Greenbush, to increase the supply by an estimated 70 million gallons per day, and consider slowing down growth until more water sources can be accessed.

Alternatives for increasing water supply include desalination plants, or purchasing water from other nearby communities — many of which may be facing similar shortages as the region continues to grow more populated.

Selectman Joseph Norton has been particularly concerned about the water supply and has suggested that all developments floated before town boards be closely examined to prevent Scituate from reaching its water withdrawal limit. Weymouth and Hingham already use a water balance program in which developers must provide water conservation measures to match their water demands to ensure supplies last longer.

Planning now for the future of the town is essential. We cannot afford to have our heads in the sand.

All of the alternatives to pumping up our water supply will come at a cost, but they are far easier to swallow than expending our most valuable natural resource.

It certainly gives us all something to think about next time we turn on the faucet.

—Alice Coyle, editor