

On March 11, 2020, I met with Greg Blackham of Solitude Lake Management during his bi-monthly inspection of the stormwater pond and had an opportunity to ask him about several matters concerning the healthiness of the pond:

1. Buffers - Greg believed the pond buffers were adequate for the size and type of the pond in the Reserves. Buffers can ideally extend upwards of 20 feet from water's edge, while our buffers are anywhere from 5 ft. to approximately 10ft. Our buffers appear to be healthy with plenty of grass and sage brush growing in them. He believed there was no need to trim or to cut any of the buffer unless it was for aesthetics. A good thick buffer helps prevent erosion of the pond's sidewalls, both from the top berm and from water's edge and promotes healthy insects, wildlife and vegetation. He opined the buffers should be left alone and not cut nor trimmed at this time. We discussed the steep embankment of the slope on parts of the pond and he believed the condition has existed for many years. He pointed out that if they were eroding, evidence would be very visible at water's edge. The area also has a break shelf (taller grasses in the water before the shoreline). Greg said that is out of design to protect anyone from drowning who might fall into the pond from the steeper embankment. He spoke of the importance not to allow trees to grow in the buffers since they can topple over and bring berm dirt with them. He observed some bayberry growing in the berm and said it was ok as their root system was shallow.
2. Aquatic plants - Greg believed the aquatic plants are an extremely valuable asset to our pond's good health. Ponds require aeration to bring needed oxygen into the pond system. Many HOA neighborhoods use a mechanical aeration system such as fountains. He believed our pond was too shallow to introduce a fountain system. Other HOAs must import aquatic plants into their systems to promote good health, bacteria, fish and other wildlife that feed off the plantings. Greg believed we were fortunate to have the plantings in the water since many ponds are without any.
3. Top of berm - Greg reported that the grass on top of the berm should be kept at a height around 4 inches at least. As we walked around the pond, it was evident the grass was not that tall and more evident bare spots existed where only dirt was visible. Greg reported that when a berm is flat, the grass height can be a bit lower but never below 2 inches. As the berm angles towards the buffer and water, grass should be kept at a taller height since it is a first line of defense against erosion. Greg said that Sussex Conservation District has begun a yearly inspection of all stormwater pond systems in 2020 and believed our system will be inspected by the District. Greg believed that the District will make recommendations if and when deficiencies are identified and he believed the top grass might be one such deficiency. He suggested that we have our landscaper seed the top berm in the fall when seeding without irrigation is more favorable.
4. Outflow area – We inspected the outflow and Greg did not believe it needed any attention at this time. He removed some floating grass debris in front of the outflow and I informed him I removed a can and vegetation debris from the outflow during the winter. He said the pond was designed so water would trickle from the outflow and not gush out unless of very heavy storms. He spoke of the drain that he helped dig with Karen Fleck several years earlier to allow the trickling to run into the wetlands beyond the walking bridge.
5. Phragmite control - Greg believed phragmites are an invasive threat to any healthy pond, water system or wetlands. He reminded me that he treated phragmites in the rear of the pond each fall. He said treating, cutting and burning phragmites over a period of years is about the only way to eradicate them. Greg was reminded that the wetlands area behind the pond to Canary Creek was Reserve property. Greg said that the small amount of treatment he performs was merely holding the phragmite at bay. Greg reported Solitude could come up with a 5 year plan to control phragmites on the Reverse's property in the wetlands if we chose them to do so. I thanked him and told him it was not necessary at this time. Greg will continue to treat the phragmite as he has been doing so and begin to initiate a plan to expand control away from berms.
6. Inflow pipes – Greg and I physically inspected the inflow pipes in December 2018 at which time some sediment was discovered. Greg said the District may inspect the piping but was not sure since they are under water in our pond system. He said that Harry Caswell is the company equipped with suction and pumping to remove any sediment from the inflow pipes. When asked if it would present a fish or wildlife kill, Greg stated it should not.

Overall, Greg believed our pond was in very good shape and doing the job it was designed to do. He believed the interest which HOA had in the pond only served as a benefit to its health. He will be glad to meet with members of the board who were not able to attend out inspection meeting. Greg Blackham was thanked for his help and guidance.

Jim Carroll  
Reserve at Pilottown  
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