

## Curing the pond: Is an herbicide really the best solution?

By **Michael Cox**/ Townsman Staff  
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**W**ellesley residents concerned with the deteriorating condition of Morse's Pond better get used to hearing the word "fluridone." It is likely to be repeated many times as the debate over how best to clean up the pond intensifies.

During a meeting at Town Hall this week, pond supporters debated the merits of using what some consider a controversial herbicide to reverse the effects of years of careless pollution that has fostered unwanted plant growth in the pond.

"Our only opposition to the pond problem is the use of fluridone," said Sarah Frost Azzam, chairwoman of the nonprofit Wellesley Cancer Prevention Project. She believes federal regulating agencies need to study the herbicide more before the town decides to use it. "It's better to be safe than sorry," she added. "I'd rather have a few weeds than a health problem for our community."

But Ken Wagner, a specialist with the environmental firm ENSR and the town's consultant on Morse's Pond, defended fluridone's use, saying he does not believe the pesticide poses an undue risk for the benefits it provides.

"Fluridone is not a carcinogen," Wagner replied. "We do not perceive there is a risk to health. "

But he added, "I have no problem at all if the town is not comfortable with it. That's why we are coming up with other solutions."

About 50 residents attended Monday's public forum to discuss the Morse's Pond Ad Hoc Committee's recommendations to fix the pond. Fifteen residents who attended the meeting identified themselves as opposed to using fluridone as a possible solution.

To get control over the rooted plants and algae infesting the pond, Wagner suggested a long list of potential remedies, including dredging the pond, a process in which the nutrient-rich sediment that feeds the plants is removed by wet or dry evacuation. However, Wagner pointed out that the cost for this alternative could soar well beyond \$5 million. "If money and permits were no factor," he said, "I would strongly consider this option."

Town officials attribute the weed and algae overgrowth in Morse's Pond to its 8.8-square-mile watershed, which drains nearby Route 9, as well as local commercial and industrial sites and homes. Some of those

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pollutants affecting the pond include road salt, gasoline, upstream septic systems, pesticides and fertilizers.

Any method the town chooses to remedy the problem must also include a watershed management program to control unwanted pollutants from entering the lake in the first place, Wagner noted.

While the process was debated, it was clear that all the residents who spoke on the matter wanted the ad hoc committee to come up with a long-term solution to the problem, even if that meant going back to the town three or four times to get the support they need.

In addition to its many recreational uses, Morse's Pond is also an important component of the town's water supply, with three gravel-packed wells drawing water from a major aquifer under the pond. Town residents use the pond to swim, boat, bird watch, fish, ice skate and walk along paths that are part of the town's trail system. The pond also is a habitat for numerous aquatic plant and animal species.

Besides its potential effects on swimmers and the water supply, Frost Azzam said she was also opposed to fluridone because of what harm it might do to animals and water creatures. "We know it kills plants. The part we're not sure about is if it will kill other things."






In addressing the drinking water issue, Wagner pointed out that the federal government has approved fluridone for use in drinking water at twice the level he would be proposing to use it. He said the fluridone would be applied at eight parts per billion, or roughly a drop for the size of a swimming pool.

"I've never been a fan of herbicides," he added. "The key is when it's appropriate to use it."

The Board of Public Works, the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) and the Recreation Commission will hold another meeting about Morse's Pond on Thursday, June 16, at 7:30 p.m. in the Great Hall at Town Hall.

Residents are encouraged to attend this education forum to lend their voices to the discussion of the options the town has been studying to protect Morse's Pond. The draft recommendations can be seen on the NRC's web site at [www.ci.wellesley.ma.us/nrc](http://www.ci.wellesley.ma.us/nrc).

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