STUDY: SAND MINE TAINTED WATER

Suffolk faults Sand Land for adverse impact

BY MARK HARRINGTON
mark.harrington@newsday.com

DOUG KUNTZ

Mulching and composting at the Sand Land site in Noyack have adversely affected the groundwater, a Suffolk County study has found.

Mulching and composting at the Sand Land Corp. site in Noyack have had "significant adverse impacts on groundwater," with elevated levels of metals beyond drinking water standards, a study by Suffolk County has found.

In addition, the downward groundwater flow at the site indicates that contaminants released on the site "may flow into deeper portions of the aquifer," which provides drinking water for the East End.

The study, part of which was published in Newsday on Friday, recommends completing a study of wells in the area "to assess possible impacts to private wells to the west and northwest of the site."

The report by Suffolk's Health Services Department recommends the state Department of Environmental Conservation and Southampton Town "ensure that the activities at the Sand Land facility are in compliance with all applicable codes, ordinances, permit requirements etc., and that the activities at the site do not further impact groundwater quality."

In a written statement, Sand Land attorney Brian Matthews noted that the company had not been provided with a copy of the final county report as of Sunday, and "cannot comment on its methodologies, results, or the scientific basis for their conclusions, if any, about the alleged cause of elevated levels of iron and manganese reportedly found at the site."

But he noted the company conducted its own investigation using outside experts and found that the groundwater "directly beneath and downgradient from the area where the vegetative waste handling historically occurred did not exceed drinking water standards" for iron and manganese.

"This evidence clearly shows that the activities at the mine site are not the source of the reported elevated levels and are not contaminating the groundwater," Matthews said. "While some elevated levels of iron and manganese were found in an isolated monitoring well away from where the vegetative waste handling historically occurred, the direction of the groundwater flow at that location confirms that any such elevated levels are not related to any activities at the site."

Matthews said Sand Land "looks forward to reviewing the County's data and protocols."

The county report recommends that if Sand Land is granted a permit to continue mulching and composting at the site, "there should be requirements to ensure that mechanisms are in place to prevent operating practices from further detrimentally impacting groundwater and surface water quality."

MANGANESE, WHICH HAS BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH NEUROLOGICAL DISORDERS, "EXCEEDED STANDARDS BY ALMOST 100 TIMES AND IRON BY OVER 200 TIMES," THE REPORT STATES.

The report notes state law enacted in January "requires groundwater testing and impermeable liners for land-clearing debris and composting facilities." It notes that the DEC is "in the process of establishing regulations. It recommends implementing requirements of the new law "as early as practicable" because of the "significant groundwater impacts."

The report also recommends the DEC should "continue to inspect the facility to ensure that all materials brought to the site are "free of contamination."

As previously reported by Newsday, the report says manganese and iron levels were found to "significantly exceed" drinking water and groundwater standards in multiple wells.

Manganese, which has been associated with neurological disorders, "exceeded standards by almost 100 times and iron by over 200 times," the report states.

In addition, excessive levels of thallium, sodium, nitrate ammonia and gross alpha radiation were found in levels above drinking water standards in on-site monitoring wells.

"It should be noted that impacts to the groundwater quality were observed despite the significant depth to the water table at the site," at 137 feet to 154 feet below grade, the report states.

The report notes that the presence of manganese and iron in off-site monitoring wells can't necessarily be attributed to Sand Land due to "geologic complexities," though nitrate off-site was considered consistent with effects from the facility.

Surface water at the site showed elevated metal concentrations as well as lower levels of two pesticides. There were also trace levels of acetaminophen, caffeine and ibuprofen in surface water.

Soil samples showed low concentrations of volatile organic compounds that didn't exceed state soil standards, the report states.

Private wells surveyed thus far around the site have "met all drinking water standards," the report states, though testing continues.

The 50-acre Sand Land mining site began operations in the 1960s, and has a current license to mine sand and gravel on 31.5 acres, the report notes. Mulching operations began more recently.

The groundwater investigation, launched in May 2015, was stalled by site access restrictions from the owner, Wainscott Sand & Gravel in Bridgehampton. An interim report released in 2016 was based on off-site monitoring only and recommended seeking permission to install on-ground wells to monitor groundwater. A warrant to access the site was granted by a state Supreme Court Judge in 2017, and 21 wells were installed last fall. The study also included a collection of 83 groundwater samples, four surface water samples and 10 samples of vegetative material on site.