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NISSEQUOGUE RIVER

THREAT: Dams

STATES: New York

SUMMARY

The Nissequogue River is a unique natural treasure on Long Island, offering important habitat for birds, fish, and wildlife. The failure of Stump Pond Dam in 2024 freed a stretch of the Nissequogue, allowing the river to restore itself and come back to life, with benefits for both people and nature. Now, a proposal to rebuild the dam threatens this progress. County and state agencies must consider alternatives to rebuilding the dam, and support a long-term vision for a healthy, free-flowing Nissequogue River.

THE RIVER

The Nissequogue River is one of the most ecologically and recreationally significant waterways on Long Island, flowing from its headwaters in Smithtown to Long Island Sound. It is designated as a “Scenic and Recreational River” by the State of New York, and “Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat” by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Named for the Indigenous people who lived in the area, this groundwater-fed river provides a home for rare Atlantic cedar, native brook trout, and is important habitat for nesting and migratory birds just 50 miles from Manhattan.

The New Mill Pond Dam — commonly known as the Stump Pond Dam — was constructed in 1798 to power a grist mill. This dam, in Blydenburgh County Park, breached in a 2024 storm.

THE THREAT

When the Stump Pond Dam failed during a major storm in August 2024, it drained the impoundment overnight. The breach rapidly transformed a 118-acre pond into more than two miles of free-flowing stream and reconnected the river to its natural floodplain.

Since the dam breach, the Nissequogue has been restoring itself. In just one growing season, the newly exposed floodplain revegetated from the native seedbank, and more than 120 plant species have been documented — including seven species listed by New York State as Species of Greatest Conservation Need. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s eBird database also shows increased bird diversity and abundance in the area. Water temperatures have been significantly cooler, reducing stress on the trout population. The 100 acres of open floodplain habitat now helps slow, store, and absorb floodwaters — reducing flooding risk both upstream and downstream during increasingly intense storms. Upstream residents

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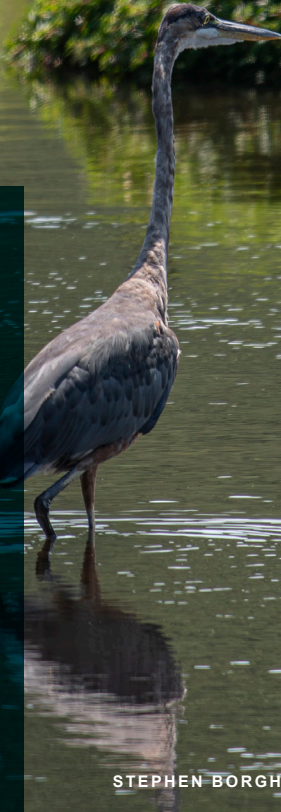
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have reported noticeably drier basements.

Now, Suffolk County is advancing a proposal to construct a new dam at the Stump Pond site, at significant expense to taxpayers. The project is expected to exceed \$10 million in construction costs, with additional long-term maintenance obligations.

Rebuilding the dam would reverse recent gains for the river and communities by disrupting fish passage, degrading water quality, trapping sediment, warming the river, eliminating valuable floodplain, and reducing the floodplain's capacity to manage stormwater.

WHAT MUST BE DONE

County and state agencies must conduct a comprehensive environmental review and consider alternatives to rebuilding the Stump Pond Dam. Suffolk County can demonstrate leadership by taking the time to evaluate costs, risks, and feasible alternatives through a transparent public process — including the option of keeping this reach of the river free-flowing.

This is an opportunity to plan for today's conditions and tomorrow's storms. A free-flowing Nissequogue River can provide meaningful public-safety and economic benefits: reduced flood risk, lower long-term maintenance liabilities, improved water quality, and healthier habitat for fish and wildlife.

The county can build on the Nissequogue's recovery since the breach and support a long-term vision for the river as a renewed, vibrant natural destination—one that

offers accessible hiking, fishing, and wildlife viewing while helping protect nearby homes and infrastructure during increasingly intense storm events.