

DRAFT letter to Ben Wright, Suffolk County Department of Public Works
c.c.: President Kenny, Barbara Chernow and Bernie Lane (University Senate President)

Dear Mr. Wright:

We, the Campus Environment Committee of the Stony Brook University Senate, are writing to oppose the proposed construction of wastewater recharge beds on the Stony Brook University Campus. The Suffolk County Department of Public Works (SCDPW) has proposed the construction of these beds as a means to meet the New York Department of Environmental Conservation (NYDEC) requirement to reduce nitrogen input into Long Island Sound from the Suffolk County Sewage Treatment plant on campus. The proposal calls for the construction of six beds of 0.72 acres each to be built along the walkway immediately west of the NYDEC building, two beds between the baseball and soccer fields west of the walkway that extends from the near the north entrance of campus to the stadium, and four beds east of the walkway that extends from near the north entrance of campus to the tennis courts. The SCDPW proposes releasing up to 1.6 million gallons per day of treated wastewater into these recharge beds.

We feel that this is an unwise way to meet the demand to reduce nitrate loading into Long Island Sound, for the following reasons:

1. There is no evidence that recharging wastewater in this manner will actually reduce nitrogen input to Long Island Sound. Recharged wastewater will enter the groundwater, which eventually flows into Long Island Sound. There is no evidence that denitrification will occur along the pathway that the wastewater will follow. Thus, recharging wastewater into groundwater merely delays the input of nitrogen into Long Island Sound, and may not reduce it.
2. There is a risk of contamination to adjacent areas from water and dust. In the proposed location, the recharge basins may allow wastewater to overflow or seep onto the playing fields or tennis courts, some of which are at lower elevation than the beds. The plans are to allow the recharge beds to dry after a short period of infiltration. The bed-bottoms will require continued scarring to maintain good infiltration rates. When dry, dust from the recharge beds could be blown over the nearby playing fields, tennis courts, walkways and parking lots. The proposal calls for placing the discharge beds less than 100 feet from walkways, than 200 feet from the NYDEC parking lot, and less than 300 feet from the west side of the NYDEC building.
3. The proposal calls for the conversion of a largely undeveloped, forested area into bare, fenced-off fields of dirt. This will have negative aesthetic and ecological impacts on the campus, and it will mean the loss of valuable open space.

We ask you to develop alternative solutions that are more environmentally sound and to consult with this committee before finalizing any plans.