

## Sewage-sniffing dogs save Salem money

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SALEM — Sable and Logan are more than a lovable pair of pets.

They are a team of sewage-sniffing canines saving municipalities such as Salem thousands of dollars.

Sable, a 9-year-old German shepherd, and Logan, a 7-year-old collie mix, are trained search dogs used to detect harmful bacteria in ponds, lakes and stormwater.

The town has contracted with FB Environmental of Portsmouth and Environmental Canine Services, a national firm with a location in Dover.

With the help of the four-legged detectives, the town will be able to determine if four local bodies of water are contaminated by sewage, according to Salem engineering director Robert Puff.

Water tests show there are high levels of E. coli bacteria in Hedgehog Pond, Captains Pond, Millville Lake and Arlington Pond, Puff said.

The town is working to improve water quality in the lake and ponds to comply with federal Environmental Protection Agency requirements, he said.

"We have to find the sources of bacteria, and reduce it and eliminate it," Puff said.

But the town doesn't know for certain why the bacteria levels are elevated, he said.

That's why the dogs and their supersensitive sense of smell were called in Wednesday to help.

They sniffed along the shores of Hedgehog and Captains ponds, detecting human contamination in the water, according to Karen Reynolds.

She runs Environmental Canine Services with her husband, Scott Reynolds. They also have search teams in the Midwest and on the West Coast.



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Karen Reynolds of Environmental Canine Services demonstrate how her dog Logan, tracks human fecal contamination in lakes, ponds and stormwater systems. Salem has hired the firm to help detect raw sewage in town ponds and solve water quality problems.

The dogs and their trainers will return in a few weeks to search for waste in Millville and Arlington, Puff said.

Although water tests can determine if E. coli is present, they cannot indicate whether it's from human or animal waste, Karen Reynolds said.

But the dogs can detect the difference between the two types of waste, making it easier to determine if water is contaminated by leaking sewage systems or animals, such as waterfowl.

Water with E. coli bacteria can cause discomfort if ingested, causing swimming areas to be posted as off limits. That includes Hedgehog Pond.

The dogs can help narrow the areas requiring testing, saving communities money in environmental costs. But they do not replace sampling and testing, Scott Reynolds said.

"We just keep going, going, going until we reach the source," Karen Reynolds said.

It cost the town several thousands dollars to hire them, but it's worth the cost, Puff said.

The couple and their dogs — both rescued from abusive owners — provided a demonstration to about 30 members of the Ingram Senior Center. They were accompanied by Emily DiFranco of FB Environmental.

"We try to help people find the solutions to their water quality problems," DiFranco said.

"Bacteria can get into the water from just about anything."

The seniors clapped as the dogs successfully pinpointed sewage among plastic containers with animal waste and distilled water.

The dogs' methods vary.

"Logan will smell it and sit down," Karen Reynolds said. "Sable will bark."

As a team, the two dogs are correct more than 90 percent of the time, Karen Reynolds said.

After the demonstration, the dogs and their handlers were headed back to Captains Pond to search for more waste.

The seniors were wowed by their performance, including Anna Kiss, 77, of Salem.

"I just loved them," she said.