

# Hatchery funding sought

BY JENNIFER MALONEY

*jennifer.maloney@newsday.com*

The Connetquot River hatchery, which for 118 years supplied trout for what has been one of the state's most heralded angling spots, stands empty. Fishing on the river has dwindled, and visiting children can no longer follow the growth of a trout from roe to fry to rainbow.

On the quiet riverbank, state and local politicians gathered last week to demand money from the state for a study to determine how to reopen the hatchery.

The facility, built in 1890 and now part of the Connetquot River State Park Preserve, was closed in January after its trout tested positive for a viral disease, infectious pancreatic necrosis..

"This jewel of a park needs to be preserved," said Assemb. Ginny Fields (D-Oakdale), a founder of the Friends of Connetquot, a non-profit organization dedicated to the park's preservation. "For [the state parks department] not to actively do what they need to do to preserve this hatchery, which is a historic site, is just wrong."

The virus causes high mortality rates among young trout, and state officials fear it could spread from the Connetquot to other waterways. The disease does not affect humans.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation has tested the river's brook, brown and rainbow trout for the virus twice since 2006; both tests were positive.

The state Parks Department and the DEC have chosen the West Virginia-based Freshwater Institute to study the river and propose ways to reopen the hatchery while keeping it free of disease.

But the Parks Department doesn't have the money. The full study will cost an estimated \$140,000, said John Kowalchuk, a deputy regional director for the Parks Department.